

The Culmination of Tradition-based *Tafsīr*
The Qur'ān Exegesis *al-Durr al-manthūr*
of al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505)

by

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations
University of Toronto

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Abstract

This is a study of Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī's *al-Durr al-manthūr fi-l-tafsīr bi-l-ma'thur* (The scattered pearls of tradition-based exegesis), hereinafter *al-Durr*. In the present study, the distinctiveness of *al-Durr* becomes evident in comparison with the *tafsīrs* of al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) and Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373). Al-Suyūṭī surpassed these exegetes by relying entirely on *ḥadīth* (tradition). Al-Suyūṭī rarely offers a comment of his own. Thus, in terms of its formal features, *al-Durr* is the culmination of tradition-based exegesis (*tafsīr bi-l-ma'thūr*).

This study also shows that al-Suyūṭī intended in *al-Durr* to subtly challenge the tradition-based hermeneutics of Ibn Taymīyah (d. 728/1328). According to Ibn Taymīyah, the true, unified, interpretation of the Qur'ān must be sought in the Qur'ān

itself, in the traditions of Muḥammad, and in the exegeses of the earliest Muslims.

Moreover, Ibn Taymīyah strongly denounced opinion-based exegesis (*tafsīr bi-l-ra'y*).

By means of the traditions in *al-Durr*, al-Suyūṭī supports several of his views in contradistinction to those of Ibn Taymīyah. Al-Suyūṭī's traditions support the following views. First, opinion-based exegesis is a valid supplement to tradition-based exegesis. Second, the early Muslim community was not quite unified. Third, the earliest Qur'ānic exegetes did not offer a unified exegesis of the Qur'ān. Fourth, Qur'ānic exegesis is necessarily polyvalent since Muslims accept a number of readings of the Qur'ān, and variant readings give rise to various interpretations.

Al-Suyūṭī collected his traditions from a wide variety of sources some of which are now lost. Two major exegetes, al-Shawkānī (d. 1250/1834) and al-Ālūsī (d. 1270/1854), copied some of these traditions from *al-Durr* into their Qur'ān commentaries. In this way, al-Suyūṭī has succeeded in shedding new light on rare, neglected, and previously scattered traditions.

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Introduction

Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) was born in Cairo in 849/1445. He was to become one of the most celebrated scholars from the medieval period of Islamic history.¹ Al-Suyūṭī's works number as many as six hundred.² Among them, his *al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* (The perfection of the sciences of the Qur'ān) has become a classical textbook of Qur'ānic studies.³ Moreover, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* is one of the most popular *tafsīrs* due to its accessibility and its placement within developed Sunnī orthodoxy. That short Qur'ān exegesis was begun by al-Suyūṭī's teacher Jalāl al-Dīn al Maḥallī (d. 864/1459) and completed by al-Suyūṭī.⁴

Despite al-Suyūṭī's fame, however, his massive *tafsīr*, *al-Durr al-manthūr fī-l-tafsīr bi-l-ma'thūr* (The scattered pearls of tradition-based exegesis) remains relatively neglected.⁵ Yet this work is important for scholarly study, for it gathers traditions from many *ḥadīth* sources and classical exegetical texts, some of them now lost.⁶ That the

¹ Roy Jackson, *Fifty Key Figures in Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

² McAuliffe, Jane Dammen, "Exegetical Sciences" in Andrew Rippin, ed. *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006, pp. 403-419, p.404.

³ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, ed. Sa'īd al-Mandūh (Beirut: Mu'assat al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyah, 2004), hereinafter the *Itqān*.

⁴ Al-Maḥallī and Al-Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* (Beirut: Maktabat Lubnān, 2000).

⁵ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr fī-l-tafsīr bi-l-ma'thūr*, ed. Shaykh Najdat Najīb (Beirut: Dar Ehia al-Tourath al-Arabi, 2001) hereinafter *al-Durr*.

⁶ I use the lowercase *ḥadīth* to depict an individual tradition, and also to denote the massive literature comprising countless *ḥadīths*. The distinction will be clear from the context. However, John

ḥadīth collections are important sources for Qur’ānic commentary has been highlighted in an article by R. Marston Speight.⁷ Al-Suyūṭī’s encyclopaedic commentary is justifiably the culmination of the exegetical genre *tafsīr bi-l-ma’thūr* (exegesis according to tradition). As a commentary of this type, *al-Durr* strictly maintains the form of the discipline, reporting traditional comments with only a very few interventions from the author.

Al-Durr will be best understood as a response to what Walid Saleh referred to as the radical hermeneutics of the Ḥanbalī theologian Ibn Taymīyah (d. 728/1328).⁸ An early distinction between *tafsīrs* of two genres, *tafsīr bi-l-ma’thūr* and *tafsīr bi-l-ra’y* (opinion-based exegesis), was brought into sharp focus in *Muqaddimah fī uṣūl al-tafsīr* (An introduction to the principles of exegesis) by Ibn Taymīyah.⁹ Such a dichotomy is misleading, but it has nonetheless become common to refer to exegetical works as being on either side of the divide. Although no work has proved itself under scrutiny to be clearly based on tradition only, the work of al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) has achieved scholarly recognition as the first major collection of exegetical traditions.¹⁰ For the last work of this genre from the medieval period, scholars usually look to a student of Ibn Taymīyah, Ibn

Burton prefers to use the uppercase *Ḥadīth* to denote the literature. See John Burton, *An Introduction to the Ḥadīth* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994) p. ix.

⁷ R. Marston Speight, “The Function of *ḥadīth* as Commentary on the Qur’ān, as Seen in the Six Authoritative Collections,” in Andrew Rippin, ed., *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur’ān* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) pp. 63-81.

⁸ Walid Saleh, “Ibn Taymiyya and the Rise of Radical Hermeneutics,” in *Ibn Taymiyya and his Times*, ed. Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 123-62, p. 125.

⁹ Ibn Taymīyah, *Muqaddimah fī uṣūl al-tafsīr in Musā’id b. Sulaymān b. Nāṣir al-Ṭayyār, Sharḥ Muqaddimah fī uṣūl al-tafsīr li-bn Taymīyah* (Damam: Dār Ibn al-Jawzī, 2007-8).

¹⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Jarīr. *Jāmi al-bayān ‘an ta’wīl āy al-Qur’ān: Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*. Beirut: Iḥya al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 2001.

Kathīr (d. 774/1373). In the introduction to his Qur’ān commentary, Ibn Kathīr outlined the same hermeneutical strategy delineated by his teacher: tradition-based hermeneutics.¹¹

The extent to which both al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr lived up to the traditional ideal is an open question. Nevertheless, these two exegetes are often regarded in academic writings as the two chronological milestones that bracket the entire history of tradition-based *tafsīrs*. However, there are two problems in seeing these two works as the best representatives from the period. The first problem is that *al-Durr* is better positioned than the *tafsīr* of Ibn Kathīr as the final major work of this nature in the middle ages. Al-Suyūfī died a mere dozen years before the fall of the Mamlūks whose defeat in Egypt, according to David Nicolle, “marked the end of the Middle Ages for the Islamic world.”¹² On the other hand, Ibn Kathīr comes too early to mark the close of the medieval period.¹³

The second problem is that, in terms of formal features, *al-Durr* is a better representative of tradition-based tafsir than both the *tafsīrs* of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr. It is clear that *al-Durr* contains a greater stock of traditional material than *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘aẓīm* of Ibn Kathīr. Hence *al-Durr* is a more comprehensive receptacle of early exegetical traditions than is the *tafsīr* of Ibn Kathīr. Moreover, in *al-Durr*, al-Suyūfī exercises exceptional restraint in expressing his opinions on exegetical questions. *Al-Durr* appears to be a mere listing of traditions linked to verses. Whatever opinions al-

¹¹ Ibn Kathīr al-Dimashqī, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘aẓīm* (Beirut: Maktabat al-Nur al-Ilmiyah, 1995).

¹² David Nicolle, *Historical Atlas of the Islamic World* (New York: Checkmark Books, 2003) p. 133.

¹³ On the problem of periodization in Islamic studies, see Sebastian Guenther, *Ideas, Images, and Methods of Portrayal: Insights into Classical Arabic Literature and Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2005) p. xx.

Suyūṭī wished to express must now be detected mainly from his selection and presentation of the traditional material. In terms of form, then, *al-Durr* is more traditional than the *tafsīr* of Ibn Kathīr, for the latter often makes his opinions explicit. Likewise, *al-Durr* is much more *ḥadīth*-oriented than is the *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān* of al-Ṭabarī. Al-Ṭabarī often evaluates the traditional material he presents, and then expresses his own opinion on the matter, at times even in defiance of the views he cites from tradition. Compared with *al-Durr*, then, the *tafsīrs* of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr begin to look like *tafsīrs* of the other genre: opinion-based exegesis (*tafsīr bi-l-ra'y*).

In fact, al-Suyūṭī's strict reliance on traditions illustrates the logical outcome of tradition-based hermeneutics. As outlined by Ibn Taymīyah, there is a hierarchy of authoritative sources for the interpretation of the Qur'ān. The answer to an exegetical question must first be sought from within the Qur'ān itself.¹⁴ If it is not found there, then the exegete has recourse to the *ḥadīth*. If the *ḥadīth* does not provide the answer, then the exegete may proceed to the sayings of the companions of Muḥammad. If the answer is still not found, the exegete may turn to the sayings of the successors to the companions of Muḥammad.¹⁵ In his reliance on the standard *ḥadīth* collections, al-Suyūṭī is thus faithful to the hermeneutical principle of explaining the Qur'ān according to the prophetic traditions. And, by inserting only a few interventions of his own, he remains true to the form of tradition-based exegesis.

¹⁴ Ibn Taymīyah, *Muqaddimah*, p. 253.

¹⁵ Ibn Taymīyah, *Muqaddimah*, pp. 258-60.

From al-Dhahabī's *al-Tafsīr wa-l-mufasssīrūn*, a comprehensive overview of the history of *tafsīr*, we can expect to obtain no more than an introduction to *al-Durr*.¹⁶ But some of al-Dhahabī's observations may serve to highlight the puzzles we need to address with regards to al-Suyūṭī and his magnum opus. First, al-Dhahabī notes that the compendium contains sheer narrations from the *salaf* on exegesis without any critical comment on the nature of the reports, whether to denounce or justify them on the basis of their chains of authorities (*asānīd*).¹⁷ Al-Suyūṭī's failure to excise the weak and exculpate the strong traditions leads to al-Dhahabī's exasperation. No mere historian, al-Dhahabī is interested in the preservation of the Salafī path, and hence suggests that someone should clean up the book by distinguishing for us its fat from its meat.

Najdat Najīb, the editor of the 2001 edition of *al-Durr*, is likewise irritated by every weak *ḥadīth* that escapes criticism. In his introduction to that edition, Najīb complains about the times when al-Suyūṭī, though reputed as a scholar of *ḥadīth*, quietly presents a weak *ḥadīth* or even a false one.¹⁸ My study is concerned neither with separating wheat from chaff in *al-Durr*, nor in judging the soundness of *ḥadīths*. My study recognises that al-Suyūṭī had his reasons for including numerous *ḥadīths* which the Salafīs find objectionable. It is a matter of historical interest that we discover those reasons.

¹⁶ Muḥammad Husayn Al-Dhahabī, *Al-Tafsīr wa-l-Mufasssīrūn* (Cairo: Matabi Dar al-Kutub al-Arabi, 1962). The author (d. 1977) should not be confused with the famous medieval tradition-critic and historian Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348).

¹⁷ *Ibid*, vol. 1, p. 254.

¹⁸ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 1, p. 26.

Second, al-Dhahabī's evaluation of *al-Durr* among other tradition-based *tafsīrs* gives much food for thought. After describing a total of eight encyclopaedic exegeses from al-Ṭabarī to al-Suyūṭī, al-Dhahabī writes,

From among these books of which we have spoken, *al-Durr* is the only one that restricts itself to tradition-based *tafsīr*. Contrary to what the others have done, *al-Durr* does not dilute the transmitted narratives with anything that is creditable to opinion.¹⁹

Through this praise of *al-Durr*, al-Dhahabī indirectly admitted that the other seven giants of *tafsīr bi-l-ma'thūr* are not really so. His retention of *al-Durr* in that category, however, needs an important clarification. As we have seen above, the stereotypical view of *al-Durr* as a tradition-only storehouse can only be maintained until one looks beyond its form to its content. As we shall see from the present study, al-Suyūṭī was not averse to opinion-based *tafsīr* coming from those who are equipped to make inferences from Qur'ānic verses. If such opinions are related from past masters, al-Suyūṭī does not shrink from relating them. He knows how *tafsīr* has always been done. The *salaf* themselves inferred much that is subsequently traded as *tafsīr bi-l-ma'thūr*.

Al-Durr is at first puzzling, for it appears counter to the current of the author's other exegetical works which embrace opinion-based exegesis. But, read as a reaction to Ibn Taymīyah's radical hermeneutics, it begins to make sense. After all, this is the same scholar who wrote half of *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, a work which al-Dhahabī included in the category of *tafsīr bi-l-ra'y*.²⁰ Moreover, al-Suyūṭī also composed *al-Iklīl fī-stinbāṭ al-*

¹⁹ Al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa-l-mufasssīrūn*, p. 254.

²⁰ Al-Dhahabī, vol. 1, p. 333.

tanzil (The crown-jewels of inferences from the revelation),²¹ an exegesis that is nothing if not a collection of opinions expressed on the meanings of Qur’ānic verses. It is the same al-Suyūṭī whom al-Dhahabī faults for following the way of al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) in pursuit of *al-tafsīr al-‘ilmī*.²² Today this term applies to the attempt to link Qur’ānic verses to scientific knowledge, hence ‘scientific *tafsīr*’. But in al-Suyūṭī’s day, as in al-Ghazālī’s, it meant no more than ‘deriving knowledge by way of exegesis,’ an alternative to empirical knowledge. The presence of *al-Durr* among al-Suyūṭī’s other *tafsīrs* thus makes sense as a response to Ibn Taymīyah.

I will now give an example of the insight into *al-Durr* one gains by reading it as a response to Ibn Taymīyah. Qur’ān 1:6 reads, “Guide us to the straight path.”²³ The point made in *al-Durr* is that the meaning of that verse is not restricted but wide open to various possibilities. After listing a variety of meanings for the term *al-ṣirāṭ* (the path) in his typical manner, and prior to moving on to a discussion of the next verse, as one might expect, al-Suyūṭī suddenly inserts four traditions which argue for the validity of polyvalent readings of the Qur’ān.²⁴ The presence of these *ḥadīths* at this particular point in his *tafsīr*, which otherwise adheres to the traditional pattern in which lemma is followed by comment, is at first glance incomprehensible. But one familiar with the

²¹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Iklīl fī-stinbāṭ al-tanzil*, edited by ‘Āmir b. ‘Alī al-‘Arabī (Jeddah: Dar al-Andalus, 2002).

²² Al-Dhahabī, vol. 3, p. 143.

²³ M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur’an: A New Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) p. 3.

²⁴ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 1, p. 36.

Muqaddimah of Ibn Taymīyah will recognise that al-Suyūṭī is here subtly arguing against the Salafī ideologue.

In his *Muqaddimah*, Ibn Taymīyah argues for a monovalent reading of the Qur’ān. For him, the task of the exegete is to aim at a verse’s singular meaning. He cautions the later generations who miss the Qur’ān’s singular meaning and thus find themselves in hopeless contradiction. According to Ibn Taymīyah, the earliest generation of Muslims presented a unified exegesis, even though they often expressed the same meaning in non-contradictory variations. Ibn Taymīyah maintains that the different meanings which the pious predecessors have assigned to the same Qur’ānic verses are variations on the same theme (*ikhtilāf tanawwu’*) and not contradictions (*ikhtilāf taḍādd*).²⁵ To illustrate this type of harmless variation, Ibn Taymīyah made reference to the various meanings typically suggested for *al-ṣirāṭ*.²⁶ In the *Itqān*, al-Suyūṭī reproduced that argument verbatim, explicitly attributing it to Ibn Taymīyah, and added the remark that the citation is “very precious.”²⁷ But then al-Suyūṭī continued in his *Itqān* to argue for a polyvalent reading of the Qur’ān. It is obvious, then, that al-Suyūṭī did not quite agree with Ibn Taymīyah’s argument. In *al-Durr*, therefore, while commenting on Qur’ān 1:6, al-Suyūṭī was responding to Ibn Taymīyah’s argument.

Al-Suyūṭī’s point here is quite opposite to that of Ibn Taymīyah. According to first two of al-Suyūṭī’s four traditions here, one cannot understand Islamic law without

²⁵ Ibn Taymīyah, *Muqaddimah*, p. 59.

²⁶ Ibn Taymīyah, *Muqaddimah*, p. 63.

²⁷ The *Itqān*, vol. 4, pp. 469 and 472.

grasping the idea of polyvalent readings. The Qur'ān means *this* and it means *that*.²⁸ The last two traditions further emphasize the polyvalent nature of Qur'ānic exegesis. These traditions recount the fourth caliph 'Alī's conflict with the seceders (*khawārij*). 'Alī commissioned his cousin Ibn 'Abbās to argue his case with them using only the *sunnah*, since the Qur'ān's meanings are multiple. Contenders may weasel their way out of the Qur'ān's dictates, but in the *ḥadīths* they will find no wiggle room.²⁹ The incident aside, these two traditions have become the stock-in-trade for the partisans of *ḥadīth* (*ahl-al-ḥadīth*). These two traditions serve as proof-texts for the need for *ḥadīths* over and above the Qur'ān. But in the hands of al-Suyūṭī the two traditions serve as well to prove the principle that they openly state. Pace Ibn Taymīyah, there is no hiding from the obvious: the Qur'ān's expressions contain multiple meanings, and there is no need to presume that the early Muslim exegetes all mean the same thing by their varied commentaries.

The discovery of al-Suyūṭī's divergence from the radical hermeneutics of Ibn Taymīyah prompts a rereading of his hermeneutical principles as detailed in the *Itqān*. There al-Suyūṭī adds a dimension to the discussion on polyvalence that could have been obscured only by Ibn Taymīyah's desire to present a unified past of which the present is a deplorable corruption. Al-Suyūṭī knows what was obvious to the pious predecessors. The reported exegeses of the *Saḥābah* were sometimes based on a variety of *qirā'āt* (readings).³⁰ This needs some elaboration, as we have become accustomed in academia to refer to interpretations as readings. An ancient unvowelled text in a Semitic language

²⁸ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 1, p. 36.

²⁹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 1, p. 36.

³⁰ The *Itqān*, vol. 4, p. 484.

such as Arabic is susceptible to be read, literally, in a variety of ways. An attempted reading is itself inseparable from the attempt to understand the text. Each suggested reading is then susceptible to a variety of interpretations. Al-Suyūṭī supplies a number of examples to show that sometimes the reported divergent exegeses of the earliest Muslims were each based on a different but acceptable reading (*qirā'ah*). Again, he does not challenge Ibn Taymīyah openly, but his point here is a useful correction to the latter's mythologizing of the past.

In the *Itqān*, al-Suyūṭī champions the use of *istinbāṭ* (deduction). He insists that God bestows special knowledge on exegetes whose actions are commensurate with their knowledge. To defend these principles, al-Suyūṭī worked hard to overcome the final chapter of Ibn Taymīyah's *Muqaddimah* which is devoted to castigating opinion-based exegesis. *Ḥadīths* cited by Ibn Taymīyah against opinion-based *tafsīr* had to be carefully and systematically worked over by al-Suyūṭī. Al-Suyūṭī's responses reached their summit in his treatment of the *ḥadīth*, "Whoever speaks of the Qur'ān without knowledge may as well assume his seat in hell." In a series of steps al-Suyūṭī styled this to mean, "Whoever speaks of the Qur'ān knowing that the truth is other than what he says may as well assume his seat in hell."³¹ The *ḥadīth* has been turned on its head.

It was conventional wisdom among exegetes that opinions are among the tools of the trade. Ibn Taymīyah boldly attempted to take away that tool, and it was al-Suyūṭī's task to regain it. Al-Suyūṭī cites the conventional wisdom given in the words of Abū Ḥayyān (d. 745/1344). Abū Ḥayyān complained about one of his contemporaries who held that *tafsīr* is restricted to the citation of tradition complete with *isnāds* linked to early

³¹ The *Itqān*, vol. 4, p. 476.

exegetes.³² Saleh's article on Ibn Taymīyah makes it clear that Ibn Taymīyah was the target of Abū Ḥayyān's criticism.³³

Al-Suyūṭī's view of al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr*, and of his own work in relation to the work of that renowned exegete, will in no small part help our understanding of *al-Durr*. Whereas al-Dhahabī sees *al-Durr* as a tradition-based *tafsīr* par excellence, al-Suyūṭī himself saw the *tafsīr* of al-Ṭabarī as the ideal. Whereas Ibn Taymīyah appreciates al-Ṭabarī as a good tradition-based exegete, al-Suyūṭī favours him above the crowd for his inclusion of opinion-based exegesis along with traditional elements. Not one to settle for mediocrity, al-Suyūṭī had to produce the epitome in every field. So why not write a *tafsīr* that trumps that of al-Ṭabarī? He intended to do just that, to compose *Majma' al-baḥrayn wa maṭla' al-badrayn* (The meeting of the two seas, and the horizon of the two full moons).³⁴ This he would have composed as a compendium of the best of both worlds: *tafsīr* based on tradition and *tafsīr* based on opinion. It was that encyclopaedia of exegesis for which he intended his *Itqān* as an introduction.³⁵ However, the exegesis is unfinished, and the little he wrote of it is lost. In that work, al-Suyūṭī managed to comment on no more than two short *sūrah*s of the Qur'ān: the first and the 108th chapters.³⁶

³² The *Itqān*, vol. 4, p. 483.

³³ Saleh, "Ibn Taymiyya," p. 123.

³⁴ The *Itqān*, vol. 4, p. 502.

³⁵ The *Itqān*, vol. 4, p. 502.

³⁶ Hāzīm Sa'īd Ḥaydar, "*Muqaddimat tafsīr al-durr al-manthūr li-l-Suyūṭī bayna-l-makhṭūṭ wa-l-maṭbū'*," *Majallat al-buḥūth wa-l-dirāsāt al-Qur'āniya*, Year 1, Issue 1 (2006) 231-301, p. 238.

Survey of scholarship

It is disappointing to see the extent to which *al-Durr* is overlooked in scholarly writings on the history of *tafsīr*. In her introduction to al-Suyūṭī's autobiography, Sartain made only a passing reference to *al-Durr* in a footnote.³⁷ Andrew Rippin made no mention of this major work in his article on *tafsīr* in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*.³⁸ Neal Robinson's *Christ in Islam and Christianity* is an excellent survey of the *tafsīr* tradition dealing with the Qur'ānic portrayal of Jesus.³⁹ Robinson began with al-Ṭabarī and ended with Ibn Kathīr. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, in her *Qur'ānic Christians*, similarly surveyed the traditional exegeses on the portrayal of Christians in the Qur'ān.⁴⁰ She has included many *tafsīrs*, traditional and modern, Sunnī, Shī'ī, and Ṣūfī, but excluded *al-Durr*. Her essay, "Qur'ānic Hermeneutics: The Views of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr," reflects in its very title the prominence of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr.⁴¹ Likewise Norman Calder, in attempting to define traditional *tafsīrs*, did not look beyond Ibn Kathīr for a work whose

³⁷ E. M. Sartain, *Jalāl al-Dīn Al-Suyūṭī: Biography and Background* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975). In her notes to the Arabic portion of this work, that being *al-Suyūṭī's* autobiography, Sartain identified the author's reference to his *tafsīr al-musnad* as being a reference to his *al-Durr* (p. 200, n. 17). But that is a mistake. As I demonstrate in Chapter 2 below, *al-Durr* is an expansion of the *tafsīr* to which the autobiography referred. The two works are not to be conflated.

³⁸ Andrew Rippin, "Tafsīr" in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (NY: Macmillan, 1987) XIV:236-44.

³⁹ Neal Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity* (Albany: SUNY, 1991) pp. 70-74.

⁴⁰ Jane Dammen Mc Auliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) pp. 38 and 71.

⁴¹ Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "Qur'ānic Hermeneutics: The Views of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr" in Andrew Rippin, ed., *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

features may inform such a definition.⁴² Yet Calder was not altogether unaware of the importance of *al-Durr*. Todd Lawson in his article on Akhbārī Shī'ī *tafsīrs* credits Calder with the view that *al-Durr* is a better representative of the genre than is the *Tafsīr* of al-Ṭabarī.⁴³

However, some of the secondary writings do highlight the importance of *al-Durr*. Claude Gilliot's article in the *Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān* mentions that *al-Durr* ought to be studied for its dependence on earlier *tafsīrs* of its genre.⁴⁴ Gilliot mentions four early exegetes whose works served as sources for *al-Durr*: Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 327/938); Ibn Mardawayh (d. 401/1010); 'Abd b. Ḥamīd (or Ḥumayd) (d. 249/863); and Ibn al-Mundhir (d. 318/930). A fairly complete edition of the *tafsīr* of Ibn Abī Ḥātim is available in print.⁴⁵ However, only minor portions of the *tafsīrs* of 'Abd b. Ḥumayd and Ibn al-Mundhir survive.⁴⁶ The *tafsīr* of Ibn Mardawayh is lost. Obviously, the lost works need to be located and studied in their own right. Nonetheless, we get an indirect glimpse of these works in *al-Durr*. For this reason, Walid Saleh, in his article in the *Blackwell*

⁴² Norman Calder, "*Tafsīr* from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr: Problems in the Description of a Genre, Illustrated with Reference to the Story of Abraham" In *Approaches to the Qur'ān*, eds. G. R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (London: Routledge, 1993), 101-140.

⁴³ Todd Lawson, "Akhbārī Shī'ī approaches to *tafsīr*," in *Approaches to the Qur'ān*, ed. G. R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (London: Routledge, 1993) 173-210, p. 205, n. 11.

⁴⁴ Claude Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān: Classical and Medieval," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane McAuliffe, Vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002), 99-124.

⁴⁵ Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī*, ed. Aḥmad Faṭḥī 'Abd al-Raḥmān Ḥijāzī (Beirut: Dar Al-Kotob al-'Ilmiyah, 2006) 7 vols.

⁴⁶ Mukhlif Banīh al-'Urf, *Qit'ah min tafsīr al-imām 'Abd ibn Ḥumayd* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2004) 137 pp.; Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. al-Mundhir al-Naysābūrī, *Kitāb tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, ed. Sa'd b. Muḥammad al-Sa'd (Medina: Dār al-Ma'āthir, 2002) 2 vols.

Companion to the Qur'ān, has drawn attention to the importance of studying *al-Durr*.⁴⁷ Moreover, in his major work on the formation of the *tafsīr* tradition, Saleh remarked, “Al-Suyūfī’s work, the only work to have relied heavily on these authors, is thus a fundamental source for us. We await a study of this work.”⁴⁸

I have already mentioned above Elizabeth Mary Sartain’s study of the life of al-Suyūfī, and al-Dhahabī’s study of *tafsīrs* in history, including those of al-Suyūfī. I will now survey some other significant works on al-Suyūfī and his contributions to Qur’ānic studies. An article by Andrew Rippin deals with the function of reports about the occasions of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) of specific Qur’ānic segments. The article mentions al-Suyūfī’s monograph on that subject.⁴⁹ In 1968 Kenneth Nolin wrote his dissertation on the *Itqān*.⁵⁰ Since then, surprisingly little has been written on the subject, as if Nolin’s work is itself the *itqān* in the field. Relying heavily on Nolin, however, Jane Dammen McAuliffe has broken nearly four decades of silence with her article on the subject in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān*.⁵¹ There is no work I know of in English that deals directly with *al-Durr*.

⁴⁷ Walid A. Saleh, "Hermeneutics: Al-Tha'labī" In *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 324-337; p. 337, n. 1.

⁴⁸ Walid A. Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition: The Qur'ān Commentary of Al-Tha'labī (d. 427/1035)* (Leiden: Brill, 2004) p. 226.

⁴⁹ Andrew Rippin, "The Function of *Asbāb-Al-Nuzūl* in Qur'ānic Exegesis," *Cambidge: Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies-University Press of London* vol. 51, pt. 1, pp. 1-20, (1988); al-Suyūfī, *Lubāb an-nuqūl fī asbāb al-nuzūl*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥammad Tamir (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfah al-Dīniyyah, 2004).

⁵⁰ Kenneth Edward Nolin, "The *Itqān* and its Sources—a Study of *al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī, with Special Reference to *al-Burhān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* by Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī," (Ph.D. thesis, Hartford Seminary, 1968).

⁵¹ Jane Dammen McAuliffe, “Exegetical Sciences” in Andrew Rippin, ed. *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006) pp. 403-419.

As one might expect, there is no shortage of works in Arabic on al-Suyūṭī. On al-Suyūṭī's linguistic skills is Najāh bt. Aḥmad al-Zahhār's "*Juhūd al-Imām Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī fī 'ilm-l-ma'ānī*."⁵² There is a comprehensive collection of articles dealing with several issues related to al-Suyūṭī: *al-Imām Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī faqīhan wa lughawīyan wa muḥaddithan wa mujtahidan*, edited by Muḥammad Tawfīq Abū 'Alī and Sālih Qishmir.⁵³

A few recent Arabic works deal with 'ulūm al-Qur'ān, *tafsīr* in general, and *al-Durr* in particular. Muḥammad Yusuf al-Shurbajī's, *al-Imām al-Suyūṭī wa juhūduh fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* deals with the three subjects.⁵⁴ Its treatment of *al-Durr* is quite informative, yet limited in scope. In the same vein is the unpublished work "*al-Imām Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī wa juhūduh fī-l-tafsīr wa 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*" by Abdul Fattah Khalifa al-Farnawānī.⁵⁵ A slightly different ordering of words is reflected in the title of Al-Hasan b. Suwardī's MA thesis: "*al-Imām al-Suyūṭī wa juhūduh fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān wa-l-tafsīr*".⁵⁶

Only a few Arabic works focus specifically on *al-Durr*. One such work concentrates on the *ḥadīths* included in *al-Durr* which speak of the virtues of Qur'ānic verses: "*Aḥādīth faḍā'il al-Qur'ān al-karīm min al-Durr al-manthūr li-l-Suyūṭī*" by Hind

⁵² Najāh bt. Aḥmad al-Zahhār, *Juhūd al-Imām Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī fī 'ilm-l-ma'ānī* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd, 2012).

⁵³ Muḥammad Tawfīq Abū 'Alī and Sālih Qishmir, editors, *al-Imām Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī faqīhan wa lughawīyan wa muḥaddithan wa mujtahidan* (Beirut: Dār al-Taqrīb, 2001) 538 pp.

⁵⁴ Muḥammad Yusuf al-Shurbajī, *al-Imām al-Suyūṭī wa juhūduh fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Damascus: Dār al-Maktabi, 1421/2000).

⁵⁵ Abdul Fattah Khalifa al-Farnawānī, *al-Imām Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī wa juhūduh fī-l-tafsīr wa 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Al-Azhar University Press, 1974).

⁵⁶ Al-Hasan b. Suwardī, *al-Imām al-Suyūṭī wa juhūduh fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān wa-l-tafsīr* (MA thesis).

Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Jārallah.⁵⁷ In the subtitle the author has clearly outlined the scope of her work on these *ḥadīths*: “*Takhrījuhā wa dirāsatu asānīdihā wa-l-ḥukm ‘alayhā*” (Identifying their sources, studying their chains of transmission, and passing judgment on them).

Some of these works draw attention to foreign elements such as Israelite tales in *al-Durr*. Such is the thesis “*al-Dakhīl fī kitāb al-Durr al-manthūr fī-l-tafsīr bi-l-ma ‘thūr li-l-Suyūṭī*” by Nawāl Abd al-Majīd Tamām.⁵⁸ The subtitle indicates that the author concentrated on the exegesis of the twenty-third to the thirty-ninth *sūrahs* of the Qur’ān. That work complements the work of Munā Muḥammad Munīr Yūsuf.⁵⁹ The titles of the two works are identical. But whereas the subtitle of the first indicates the study’s focus on one portion of the Qur’ān, the subtitle of the second indicates a focus on another portion: the twelfth to twenty-second Qur’ānic chapters. Along the same lines is the doctoral work of Ilhām Yūsuf Ṣaḥṣāḥ: “*al-Dakhīl wa-l-isrā’īlīyāt fī tafsīr al-Durr al-manthūr fī-l-tafsīr bi-l-ma ‘thūr li-l-Suyūṭī*”.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Hind Muḥammad b. Ali al-Jārallah, *Aḥādīth faḍā’il al-Qur’ān al-karīm min al-Durr al-manthūr li-l-Suyūṭī: Takhrījuhā wa dirāsatu asānīdihā wa-l-ḥukm ‘alayhā* (M.A. Thesis: Al-Ri’āṣah al-‘Āmmah, Riyadh. 1993).

⁵⁸ Nawāl Abd al-Majīd Tamām, *al-Dakhīl fī kitāb al-Durr al-manthūr fī-l-tafsīr bi-l-ma ‘thūr li-l-Suyūṭī: Taḥqīq wa dirāsa min awwali sūrat al-mu ‘minūn ilā ākhir surat al-zumar* (MA thesis: al-Azhar University Press, 1987).

⁵⁹ Munā Muḥammad Munīr Yūsuf, *al-Dakhīl fī kitāb al-Durr al-manthūr fī-l-tafsīr bi-l-ma ‘thūr li-l-Suyūṭī: Taḥqīq wa dirāsa min awwali sūrat yūsuf ilā ākhir surat al-ḥajj*, (M.A. thesis: al-Azhar University Press, n.d.).

⁶⁰ Ilhām Yūsuf Ṣaḥṣāḥ, *al-Dakhīl wa-l-isrā’īlīyāt fī tafsīr al-Durr al-manthūr fī-l-tafsīr bi-l-ma ‘thūr li-l-Suyūṭī* (Ph.D. Thesis: Al-Azhar University Press, 1986).

It is my hope that the present study of *al-Durr* will add to this body of literature and serve to increase our comprehension of its contents, its purpose, and its place in the history of *tafsīr*.

Thesis Outline

What follows is an outline of my thesis. The first chapter summarizes the life and accomplishments of al-Suyūṭī. I draw attention to both his remarkable literary accomplishments and his controversial views.

The second chapter examines al-Suyūṭī's sources, and his reasons for composing a tradition-based exegesis. I also delve into the mysterious relationship between *al-Durr* and al-Suyūṭī's lost tradition-based *tafsīr*. I show that *al-Durr* is an expansion of the lost work.

In the third chapter I show that al-Suyūṭī has drawn together an extraordinary number of exegetical traditions containing legends. He presents such traditions in a fair light, even in cases where earlier tradition-based *tafsīrs* had dubbed the stories as Israelite tales. I also show that two significant subsequent *tafsīrs*, those of al-Shawkānī and al-Ālūsī, have been influenced by al-Suyūṭī's inclusion of these stories. Al-Suyūṭī's influence on these two exegetes will likewise be shown with reference to the themes of my next four chapters.

In my fourth chapter I show that, while explicating Qur'ānic verses in praise of wisdom (*ḥikmah*), the earlier tradition-based *tafsīrs* attempted to reduce *ḥikmah* to the *sunnah*, the practice of Muḥammad. On the other hand, al-Suyūṭī reclaimed the meaning of *ḥikmah* as wisdom. He also illustrated the fruits of wisdom by supplying a large number of traditions highlighting the wisdom of Solomon and Luqmān.

My fifth chapter continues to deal with wisdom pronouncements, but now of Jesus. In his exegesis of Qur'ān 3:48, al-Suyūṭī included one hundred and four traditions depicting Jesus' wisdom. The inclusion of such a large stock of traditions depicting the wisdom of Jesus renders al-Suyūṭī's exegesis of that verse a unique moment in the history of *tafsīr*. Al-Suyūṭī also depicted the Christ Child as espousing allegorical scriptural exegesis. Moreover al-Suyūṭī showed Jesus to be a wandering ascetic. Thus both Jesus' exegesis and his lifestyle have been made to conform to al-Suyūṭī's Ṣūfī expectations.

The sixth chapter shows al-Suyūṭī's extraordinary interest in the political and sectarian conflicts that split the early Muslim communities. His daring inclusion of traditions naming significant early personages as perpetrators of *fitnah* (civil strife) makes his exegesis distinct from the earlier tradition-based ones. Though a Sunnī, al-Suyūṭī has included traditions which Shī'īs have used in their anti-Sunnī polemics.

In my seventh chapter I show that al-Suyūṭī had a special interest in *qirā'āt* (readings) of the Qur'ān. He included in *al-Durr* traditions mentioning a wide range of early readings. Moreover, he developed in his *Itqān* a special theory that justifies the use of such readings in Qur'ānic exegesis.

In my final chapter I draw together various minor conclusions reached in the previous chapters to show how these altogether indicate the major conclusion from this study: that al-Suyūṭī's exegesis is a response to the radical hermeneutics of Ibn Taymīyah.

Chapter 1

The Life and Works of al-Suyūṭī

1.1 Life

As a prelude to our examination of *al-Durr al-manthūr*, I will set forth here an outline of the life of its author. The life of al-Suyūṭī, Abū al-Faḍl ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr b. Muḥammad, has already been amply described by E. M. Sertain in her *Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī: Biography and Background*.⁶¹ It will therefore suffice here to provide a brief sketch of his life with special attention to those events which have some bearing on his exegetical activity in general and on his *al-Durr al-manthūr* in particular. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr was born in Cairo in 849/1445.⁶² In recognition of his scholarship, he came to be called Jalāl al-Dīn (the glory of the religion). I will refer to him simply as al-Suyūṭī (a reference to Asyūt in Upper Egypt which his father left behind when he moved up to Cairo).⁶³

Primary biographical information on al-Suyūṭī is abundant. He has written an autobiography *al-Taḥadduth bi niʿmat Allāh* (Speaking of the blessings of God), edited

⁶¹ M. Sertain, *Jalāl al-Dīn Al-Suyūṭī: Biography and Background* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975). Abū-l-Faḍl is a nickname (*kunya*).

⁶² Sertain, p. 24.

⁶³ His *nisbah* (toponymic appellation) might therefore be expected to be al-Asyūṭī. However, the other spelling represents a smoother pronunciation, and this is what al-Suyūṭī's father preferred as the family's designation.

and introduced by Sartain.⁶⁴ Al-Suyūṭī has also written *Ḥusn al-muḥāḍarah*, a history of Cairo, in which he himself is featured.⁶⁵ Aside from this, biographical details can be gleaned from many of his writings. Moreover, some of al-Suyūṭī's students have written biographies of their teacher. Al-Shādhilī has composed *Bahjat al-'ābidīn bi-tarjamat ḥāfiẓ al-'asr Jalāl al-Dīn*.⁶⁶ Another student, Shams al-Dīn al-Dāwūdī, wrote *Tarjamat al-Suyūṭī* which survives only in manuscript form.⁶⁷

Al-Suyūṭī was nurtured in a scholarly environment in which many state-supported Islamic teaching institutions were established. Among the remarkable literary productions of the period is the extensive *ḥadīth* commentary of Ibn Ḥajar (d. 852/1448) and, more notable for its innovativeness, the Qur'ān exegesis of al-Biqā'ī (d. 885/1480).⁶⁸ Al-Suyūṭī recalls that when he was only three years old he had accompanied his father to Ibn Ḥajar's lectures on *ḥadīth*.

Al-Suyūṭī's father, of Persian origin, had taught Shāfi'ī law in Cairo where he also acted as a substitute Qādī. Al-Suyūṭī was merely six years old when his father died. The boy was subsequently cared for, and taught, by his father's scholarly friends such as

⁶⁴ E. M. Sartain, *Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī: Biography and Background* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

⁶⁵ Al-Suyūṭī, *Ḥusn al-muḥāḍarah fī tārikh Miṣr wa-l-Qāhirah* (Cairo: 'Isā al-Babī al-Ḥalabī, 1967-68).

⁶⁶ Abd al-Qādir al-Shādhilī, *Bahjat al-'ābidīn bi-tarjamat ḥāfiẓ al-'asr Jalāl al-Dīn*, ed. Abd al-Ilah Nabhān (Damascus: Majma' al-Lughat al-'Arabiyya, 1998).

⁶⁷ Shams al-Din al-Dāwūdī, "Tarjamat al-Suyūṭī." Sartain was able to access microfilms of this work from Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Depot der Staatsbibliothek (see Sartain, p. ix).

⁶⁸ Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī. *Fath al-bārī bi sharḥ saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1998); Ibrahim b. 'Umar al-Biqā'ī, *Naẓm al-durar fī tanāsib al-āyāt wa-l-suwar* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2006).

Jalāl al-Dīn al Maḥallī (d. 864/1459). By his eighth birthday, al-Suyūṭī had memorized the Qurʾān. At eighteen, he inherited his father’s position as teacher of Shāfiʿī law at the mosque of Shaykhū, and he began issuing juristic rulings as well. At twenty-two years of age he was dictating *ḥadīth* at the mosque of Ibn Ṭulūn where his father had been a preacher. In doing so, al-Suyūṭī was determined to revive a practice that had been out of vogue since the death of Ibn Ḥajar almost two decades earlier. Nominated by his teacher al-Kāfiyājī (d. 879/1474), and supported by the Mamlūk *amīr*, he obtained the post of *ḥadīth* teacher at the Shaykhūniyah a year later.⁶⁹

In the year 891/1486, when al-Suyūṭī was just over forty years old, he decided to give up his teaching positions in order to devote his time to research and writing. It was not a complete retreat from public life, as he was in the same year appointed in a largely administrative role as *shaykh* of the Ṣūfīs at the Baybarsīyah Khānqah.⁷⁰ He retained a similar post, which he held since he was twenty-five years old, as *shaykh* of the Ṣūfīs at the mausoleum of Barqūq al-Nāṣirī, the late governor of Syria.⁷¹ He also retained his room in the mosque of Ibn Ṭulūn where he kept his books, and where he may have conducted much of his study.⁷²

1.2 Controversies

Al-Suyūṭī was surrounded by scholars who were always on guard to preserve tradition and always watchful to weed out innovations, deviations, and heresies. Al-

⁶⁹ Sartain, p. 42.

⁷⁰ Sartain, pp. 25-26, 45, and 82.

⁷¹ Sartain, pp. 44-45.

⁷² Sartain, p. 46.

Suyūfī was himself very much at home with such traditionalism. He had, for example, ruled against the study of logic since he was eighteen.⁷³ He considered the study of *ḥadīth* the noblest of all the sciences, and believed that God had guided him to the study of that very science as a suitable substitute for any dabbling in the ways of the Greeks.⁷⁴ Hence he had been inspired to love the practice of the Prophet (the *sunnah*) and to hate innovations (*bid'ah*).⁷⁵ Al-Suyūfī was thus constrained not only by the criticisms of other scholars, but also by his own traditionalism.

Nevertheless, aware of the power of his pen, which he was ever ready to wield in his own defence, al-Suyūfī provoked his critics time and again. He prompted several acrimonious disputes due to his willingness to test his fellow scholars' tolerance for innovations, and his constant probing at the boundaries of orthodoxy. As noted by Iyād Khālīd al-Ṭabbā', it is as a result of such activity that we now possess a stock of articles and counter-articles depicting the dispositions of al-Suyūfī and his opponents.⁷⁶ According to al-Sakhāwī (d. 902/1497) in his *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi' fī a'yān al-qarn al-tāsi'*, al-Suyūfī's written denunciation of logic is a copy of Ibn Taymīyah's anathema of the science.⁷⁷ In his defense, al-Suyūfī pointed out that in those days he had not even read Ibn

⁷³ Sartain, p. 33.

⁷⁴ For the orthodox resistance to logic more generally, see Mufti Ali, "A Statistical Portrait of the Resistance to Logic by Sunni Muslim Scholars: Based on the Works of Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī" in *Islamic Law and Society* 15 (2008) 250-67.

⁷⁵ Sartain, pp. 32-33.

⁷⁶ Iyād Khālīd al-Ṭabbā', *al-Imām al-ḥāfiẓ Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī: ma'lamatu-l-'ulūm al-Islāmiyya* (Damascus: Dar al-Qalam, 1997) p. 82.

⁷⁷ Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi' li-ahl al-qarn al-tāsi'* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qudsī, 1934-36) vol. 4, p. 66; Sartain, p. 54.

Taymīyah's *Naṣīḥat ahl al-īmān fī-l-radd 'alā maṭīq al-yūnān* (*Advice for the faithful: in refutation of the logic of the Greeks*).⁷⁸

In his mid-twenties, al-Suyūṭī fell into further disputation when he defended the Ṣūfī poet 'Umar b. al-Fāriḍ (d. 632/1235) who had been accused of heresy. The latter's expressions in *al-Qaṣīdah al-ṭā'īyah* (The ode rhyming in the letter *tā'*) convinced some scholars that he believed in *ḥulūl* and *ittiḥād* (the divine spirit's incarnation in, or union with, man).⁷⁹ On the other hand, al-Suyūṭī believed that Ibn al-Fāriḍ was one of God's saints whose poetic language was misunderstood. Hence al-Suyūṭī took issue with his contemporaries for casting aspersions on a pious man who had been dead for three centuries. Al-Suyūṭī made a similar defence of yet another famously controversial Ṣūfī, Muhyī-l-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240). In both cases al-Suyūṭī aimed for compromise by suggesting that the controversial books be banned lest laypersons should misunderstand the poetic license employed therein.⁸⁰ Many articles composed by al-Suyūṭī in response to these and other disputes are mentioned in his autobiography, and have been conveniently collected in his *al-Ḥāwī li-l-fatāwī* (The receptacle of juristic determinations).⁸¹

⁷⁸ Ibn Taymīyah, *Kitāb al-radd 'alā al-maṭīqīyīn: naṣīḥat ahl al-īmān fī al-radd 'alā maṭīq al-Yūnān* ed. 'Abd al-Ṣamad Sharaf al-Dīn al-Kutubī and Muḥammad Ṭalḥah Bilāl Minyār (Beirut: Mu'assat al-Rayyan, 2005). See also Wael B. Hallaq, *Ibn Taymiyya against the Greek logicians* (trans. of *Jahd al-qarīḥah fī tajrīd al-naṣīḥah*) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁷⁹ For this definition of the two terms, taken together, see Sartain, p. 54. For a detailed discussion of each term, see *EL*², "Ittiḥād", and "Ḥulūl".

⁸⁰ Sartain, p. 55.

⁸¹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥāwī li-l-fatāwī* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 2004) 2 vols.

About three years before his fortieth birthday, al-Suyūṭī made public his self-assessment that he had achieved the status of a *mujtahid* (one qualified to perform *ijtihād*, independent juristic reasoning). Appropriating to himself such a lofty status, al-Suyūṭī thus stirred some controversy resulting in significant disputations in the year 889/1484. His claim was met with two main objections.

First, his opponents believed that the gates of *ijtihād* had been closed for half of a millennium.⁸² Second, the presumed closure of the gates of *ijtihād* was the corollary of another presumption: that no one could reach the grade of an independent *mujtahid* after the blessed era of the eponyms of the four dominant schools of Sunnī jurisprudence. To deal with these objections, al-Suyūṭī composed *al-Radd alā man akhlada ilā-l- 'ard wa jahila anna-l-ijtihād fī kulli 'asr farḍ* (A refutation of those who cling to the earth not knowing that *ijtihād* is an obligation in every era).⁸³ That monograph is a sustained argument in favour of the independent exertion of juristic effort. Al-Suyūṭī supported his argument not only with references to the Qur'ān but also by appealing to previous scholars, including scholars postdating the fourth century—the date of the presumed closure.

Responding to the second objection, al-Suyūṭī assures his readers that he is merely claiming the right to absolute *ijtihād* (*ijtihād muṭlaq*). He explains that he is not claiming the right to independent *ijtihād* (*ijtihād istiqlāl*), for he remains a follower of the

⁸² Sartain, p. 66.

⁸³ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Radd alā man akhlada ilā-l- 'ard wa jahila anna-l-ijtihād fī kulli 'asr farḍ* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1983). See Sartain, pp. 63-64.

Shāfi‘ī school.⁸⁴ He writes further that he is an absolute attached *mujtahid* (*mujtahid muṭlaq muntasib*), and that he is therefore not independent (*mustaqill*) of his legal school. In sum, he maintains that he follows the principles of the school as set out by Imām al-Shāfi‘ī, but he is free to arrive at new rulings based on those principles.⁸⁵

However, a third objection was launched against his claimed status of *mujtahid*. It was suggested that one of the prerequisites of such a rank was a knowledge of logic, the very subject which al-Suyūṭī had once declared *ḥarām* (prohibited). Not to be defeated on this score, al-Suyūṭī rushed to demonstrate his knowledge of the subject. It was then that he wrote *Ṣawn al-manṭiq wa-al-kalām* (The safeguarding of logic and dialectic theology), a summary of Ibn Taymīyah’s book cautioning against the logic of the Greeks.⁸⁶

Al-Suyūṭī was not bashful about his accomplishments. Among the many subjects he had studied, he boasted of his mastery of seven: *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *naḥw* (syntax), and rhetoric. Rhetoric consisted of three subjects: *ma’ānī* (word order), *bayān* (figures of speech), and *badī’* (embellishment).⁸⁷ Of the seven subjects altogether, al-Suyūṭī claims the status of *ijtihād* not only in *fiqh*, as already seen above, but also in *ḥadīth* and in the Arabic language.⁸⁸ How one can be a *mujtahid* in *ḥadīth* and in the Arabic language required an explanation. However, al-Suyūṭī furnished such an

⁸⁴ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Radd*, p. 116.

⁸⁵ Sartain, p. 64.

⁸⁶ Al-Suyūṭī, *Ṣawn al-manṭiq wa-al-kalām* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1947); Wael B. Hallaq, *Ibn Taymīyya against the Greek logicians* (trans. of *Jahd al-qarīḥah fī tajrīd al-naṣīḥah*) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁸⁷ For the meaning of these and other rhetorical terms see Hussein Abdul-Raof, *Arabic Rhetoric: A Pragmatic Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 2006) pp. 278-90.

⁸⁸ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Taḥadduth*, p. 205.

explanation in his autobiography. A brief summary will suffice here. A *mujtahid* in the Arabic language must have mastered the works of the grammarians from Sībawayh (d. 180/796) to al-Suyūṭī's day, and must be familiar with most of the Arabic poetry which have been used as proof-texts in discussions among grammarians.⁸⁹ As for *ḥadīth*, one achieves the coveted status of *mujtahid* when one reaches such a level of proficiency that his pronouncements on the validity of individual *ḥadīths* are considered authoritative.⁹⁰ To al-Suyūṭī, the title *ḥāfiẓ* (memorizer) of *ḥadīths*, already commonly used, indicates the same status as does the title *mujtahid*.⁹¹

1.3 Mujaddid

Aware of the extent of his readings, and the proliferation of his writings, al-Suyūṭī was convinced that he was the greatest scholar of his time. Hence he did not stop at the claim of being a *mujtahid*, but aspired to an even higher rank. Near the close of the ninth century, he expressed the hope that he would be the *mujaddid*, the renewer of the religion, for that century.⁹² For, according to a *ḥadīth* recorded in the collection of Abū Dāwūd, someone will arise at the turn of every century to perform this vital function.⁹³ As Landau-Tasseron notes, the *ḥadīth*'s expression *ra's al-sanah* could mean 'the head of

⁸⁹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Taḥadduth*, p. 209.

⁹⁰ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Taḥadduth*, p. 210.

⁹¹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Taḥadduth*, p. 209.

⁹² Sartain, p. 69.

⁹³ For a discussion of this *ḥadīth*, see Ella Landau-Tasseron, "The "cyclical reform": a study of the *mujaddid* tradition" in *The Ḥadīth: Critical Concepts in Islamic Studies* ed. Mustafa Shah (New York: Routledge, 2010) 4 vols., vol. 4, pp. 177-207. The *ḥadīth* occurs at the head of Abū Dāwūd's chapter *Kitāb al-malāḥim* (The Book of Apocalyptic Battles).

the century’, but the expression was commonly taken to mean ‘the turn of the century’.⁹⁴ On that basis, ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Aziz (d. 101/720) was accepted as the first such reformer, followed by the Imam al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 204/820). Both these savants had survived the turn of their respective centuries. However, disagreement remains over the identity of the reformers pertaining to the subsequent centuries.

Likewise, al-Suyūṭī’s self-proclaimed candidacy is far from settled, although some significant scholars accept the claim. Al-‘Azīmābādī, the commentator on Abū Dāwūd’s *Sunan*, provides a list of the savants who have been considered to be the reformers over the centuries. In that list al-Suyūṭī occupies the position for the ninth century.⁹⁵ However, al-Suyūṭī was aware that, according to some *ḥadīths*, a *mujaddid*’s qualifications for the status will be acknowledged by his contemporaries.⁹⁶ It is in securing such recognition that al-Suyūṭī had the greatest difficulty. For, whereas among his contemporaries he had many admirers, he also had his share of detractors who rejected his claim.⁹⁷ Sartain wrote: “But he was most certainly not recognized as a *mujaddid* by his contemporaries, who found his conceit intolerable, even in an age in which self-praise was not unusual.”⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Landau-Tasseron, p. 197, n. 1.

⁹⁵ Al-‘Azīmābādī, *‘Awn al-Ma‘būd: Sharh Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.) vol. 11, p. 392, in *Al-Marji’ al-akbar li-l-turāth al-Islāmī*, 3rd edition (Beirut, Elariss, n. d.), flash disk, hereinafter *al-Marji’* flash disk.

⁹⁶ Sartain, pp. 69-70.

⁹⁷ Landau-Tasseron, p. 182.

⁹⁸ Sartain, p. 71.

Al-Suyūṭī had studied the cyclical reform tradition carefully, and had gone over the history of the candidacy for this role thoroughly. In his autobiography, he had systematically listed the known reformers over the centuries according to divergent lists approved by various notable scholars. Finally, he concludes the nineteenth chapter of his autobiography, where the story of his life ends, with these words:⁹⁹

Here we are in the year eight hundred and ninety-six. Neither the Maḥdī nor Jesus has come. Moreover, the signs that should presage their imminent arrival have not appeared. Perhaps this writer, who is in need of the favour of God, should hope that God will favour him to be the reformer at the turn of the century. And that is not difficult for God.¹⁰⁰

As Sartain explained, al-Suyūṭī would have to remain alive for another few years until the beginning of the following century if he were to qualify for the position he so desired. And this he could not guarantee. Such uncertainty explains the tentative nature of al-Suyūṭī's claim. But this is not the end of the matter. Al-Suyūṭī subsequently wrote a separate treatise, *Kitāb al-tanbi'ah bi-man yab'athuhu Allāh 'ala ra's al-mi'ah* (The book of the prophecy regarding the one whom God will commission at the turn of the century).¹⁰¹ In writing that treatise, al-Suyūṭī expressed greater confidence that he would survive the single year that remained of the ninth century.¹⁰²

The purpose of al-Suyūṭī's mention of the Maḥdī and of Jesus becomes clearer in his *al-Ḥāwī*. He needed to prove that the Muslim community will itself survive into

⁹⁹ In the remaining two chapters he merely lists his positions on controversial issues regarding *fiqh* (chapter 20) and *ḥadīth* (chapter 21).

¹⁰⁰ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Taḥadduth*, p. 227, trans. mine. For a partial alternative translation see Landau-Tasseron, p. 182.

¹⁰¹ Landau-Tasseron, p. 199, n. 32.

¹⁰² Sartain, p. 69.

another century so as to be in need of another reformer. Already at the end of the eighth century, there was an expectation in Egypt that the promised reformer at the turn of the century would be either the Mahdī or Jesus.¹⁰³ As the ninth century now drew to a close, that unfulfilled expectation was replaced with new hope that the two personages will appear at the dawn of the tenth century, and that the close of the millennium will mark the end of the world. A religious verdict was even in circulation to that effect, and was brought to the attention of al-Suyūṭī who had to clarify the matter. In his *al-Ḥawī* he writes that he had composed a tract which he entitled *al-Kashf ‘an mujāwazat hādhi-l-ummah al-alf* (The unveiling of this community’s crossing over of the millennium).¹⁰⁴ He now briefly explains the contents of that tract. According to al-Suyūṭī, the Mahdī will precede the Dajjāl (Antichrist) by seven years, and it is this latter figure that will arise at the turn of a century.¹⁰⁵ Now it is known that Jesus in his second advent will remain with us for forty years after slaying his antithesis. Eventually the sun will rise from the west. Between this cosmic reversal and the first blowing of the trumpet one hundred and twenty years will pass. And between the two trumpet blasts there will be forty years. This amounts to at least two hundred years, whereas at the time of al-Suyūṭī’s writing only one hundred and two years remained of the current millennium.

Hence from al-Suyūṭī’s vantage point the apocalypse could not occur soon. It was impossible for the Dajjāl to arise at the turn of the present century, because only two years of it remained, and thus far there had been no sign of the Mahdī. Therefore the

¹⁰³ Landau-Tasseron, p. 178.

¹⁰⁴ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥawī*, vol. 2. p. 104.

¹⁰⁵ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥawī*, vol. 2. p. 104.

Dajjāl must make his entry at least a hundred years later at the turn of another century.¹⁰⁶ Relying on certain *aḥādīth*, al-Suyūṭī's contemporaries had presumed that these events would all unfold within the first millennium. However, al-Suyūṭī explains, with reference to other *aḥādīth*, that the world is set to last seven millennia, of which Muḥammad was commissioned in the latter half of the sixth.¹⁰⁷ Hence the upper limit on the life of the *ummah* is fifteen hundred years and not merely a millennium as some scholars supposed. Yet al-Suyūṭī could not set a definite date for the apocalypse, because his sources do not specify the period that must elapse between the rise of the Antichrist and the reversal of the sun's natural course. Nonetheless, al-Suyūṭī had no hesitation in declaring that there was room for at least one more reformer as the ninth century neared its end. It was his hope that he would be blessed with that distinction.

1.4 Disappointment and Seclusion

As we have seen, al-Suyūṭī did not succeed in securing his contemporaries' recognition of him as the greatest scholar of his era. His principal detractor al-Sakhāwī criticized him for acquiring his knowledge from books rather than through companionship with living scholars. Al-Sakhāwī saw al-Suyūṭī's sole reliance on books as being a reason for the presence of spelling errors and other mistakes in al-Suyūṭī's works. Aside from pestering him with many petty claims, al-Sakhāwī also accused him of passing off the works of other scholars as his own after copying them from the Maḥmūdiyyah library and other repositories of old books. Moreover, the same critic

¹⁰⁶ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥawī*, vol. 2. pp. 104-5.

¹⁰⁷ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥawī*, vol. 2. p. 104.

culled together a list of books which, he claimed, al-Suyūṭī stole from Ibn Ḥajar.¹⁰⁸ Al-Suyūṭī responded to charges of plagiarism by explaining that he always attributes to his sources whatever material he copies. Indeed, as noted by Sartain, al-Suyūṭī usually attributes copied material to their sources; and al-Suyūṭī often reminds his readers of his personal commitment to continue doing so.¹⁰⁹

Another disparager, Ibrāhīm b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl al-Karakī (d. 922/1516), known as Ibn al-Karakī, proved more dangerous to al-Suyūṭī not for the quality of his complaints but for his influence with the Sultan Qāyṭbāy. We know of his accusations only indirectly, by reading al-Suyūṭī’s responses. That al-Suyūṭī should bother to respond to some of these criticisms reveals something about his determination to defend his reputation against the most insignificant of charges. Al-Suyūṭī stooped to answer the *ad hominem* cavil, for example, that his mother was a Circassian whose ancestors were from Persia. Al-Suyūṭī responded by saying that genealogy is traced through paternity, and that, in any case, most of the great people of the nation were sons of such foreign concubines. Moreover, the union of an Arab father and a non-Arab mother produces sons in whom are combined the best of both worlds in terms of constitution, character and charm. Finally, al-Suyūṭī declared himself satisfied that his father was a descendant of the Prophet’s companions.¹¹⁰

If his entanglement with his fellow scholars was limited to verbal and written exchanges, al-Suyūṭī faced a greater danger from the rulers of his day, and, surprisingly,

¹⁰⁸ Sartain, pp. 74-75.

¹⁰⁹ Sartain, p. 76.

¹¹⁰ Sartain, pp. 78-79.

from his fellow Ṣūfīs. As mentioned above, al-Suyūṭī was *shaykh* of the Ṣūfīs at the tomb of Barqūq. Eventually, supervision of the tomb fell under the auspices of the sultan Qāyṭbāy. The sultan demanded that the *shaykh* should come up to the Citadel, the sultan's residence, at the beginning of each month. Al-Suyūṭī ignored that demand on the principle that it is contrary to the custom of the *salaf* (the predecessors) to frequently visit rulers. Al-Suyūṭī was eventually issued an official command to show up at the Citadel, and he had to obey. But he was not in the mood to tolerate any display of ignorance of Islamic practices or any challenge to his own knowledge. The sultan suggested that the *ṭaylasān*, the head-covering al-Suyūṭī was wearing, indicated that he belonged to the Mālikī school of Islamic jurisprudence. It was not sufficient for al-Suyūṭī to simply clarify that Shāfi'īs too have been accustomed to wearing it, though not recently. This rather became a point of contention between him and Ibn al-Karakī whom al-Suyūṭī suspected of constantly stirring up the sultan against him. Al-Suyūṭī insisted that the *ṭaylasān* is a *sunnah* of Muslims; but Ibn al-Karakī characterized it as a practice of the Jews. As was his custom, al-Suyūṭī did not lay the matter to rest without writing a collection of *ḥadīths* indicating the virtues of the said headgear.¹¹¹

Five months later, the sultan intended to pay out the usual stipends to al-Suyūṭī and his fellow Ṣūfīs, for which purpose they were all summoned to the Citadel. But, the *shaykh* stuck to his principles and refused to go. As might be expected, the salaries were paid only to those who were present. What bothered al-Suyūṭī most about this incident was not the withholding of his stipend, but the quietude of other scholars who failed to support his principled stand. He thus resigned in disgust from his position as *shaykh* of

¹¹¹ Sartain, pp. 88-89.

the Ṣūfīs at the tomb of Barqūq and wrote a tract proving his alignment with the pious predecessors on this matter. The matter did not end there, as the sultan could not ignore the insolence of his subject. Al-Suyūṭī was summoned to the Citadel with such urgency that the chief *qāḍī* sent someone to plead with him, suggesting an intermediary who might help gain access to the sultan's better dispositions. But al-Suyūṭī was spared the effort, as the sultan soon became ill and died (901/1496). Al-Suyūṭī was certain that this outcome was due to his own prayers.¹¹²

But the death of Qāyṭbāy did not mark the end of al-Suyūṭī's struggles with the temporal powers of his day. He received some reprieve when he managed to persuade the caliph al-Mutawakkil 'alā Allāh 'Abd al-'Aziz to appoint him as *qāḍī-l-quḍāh al-akbar* (chief judge of judges). But this was not to last. The caliph was merely a titular head ratifying each new sultan's ascent to power but exercising no functional authority. The new sultan Muḥammad b. Qāyṭbāy was only fourteen years of age, but al-Suyūṭī's opponents did not see the sultan's young age as a reason for the caliph to bypass him in such matters. Pressured by the *qāḍīs*, the caliph rescinded his offer.¹¹³

As for the Ṣūfīs at the Baybarsīyah *khānqah*, al-Suyūṭī suffered at their hands as well. The years between the death of the senior Qāyṭbāy and the rise of sultan Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī (906/1501) witnessed a quick turnover of leadership, and some depletion of the state treasury. To deal with this economic crisis, levies were administered against some of the endowment funds available to support the Ṣūfīs. Working with a tight budget, al-Suyūṭī had to make decisions on the allotment of stipends. He defended his own right,

¹¹² Sartain, pp. 88-90.

¹¹³ Sartain, pp. 92-94.

being a scholar, to reserve for himself his usual allowance in accordance with the stipulations of the endowment. On the other hand, he curtailed the allowances to those in his charge. He justified the cutback by arguing that on the strict enforcement of the terms of the endowment some would not qualify for even the reduced amount, being as they are pseudo-Şūfīs. Naturally, many of the Şūfīs were dissatisfied with this outcome. But, to al-Suyūfī's surprise, ill-feeling rose to such heights that the Şūfīs one day picked him up and threw him into a fountain. That occurred in the year 903/1498.¹¹⁴

Despite this humiliating episode, al-Suyūfī stubbornly retained his position as *shaykh* of the Şūfīs at the Baybarsīyah. But when Tūmānbāy became sultan in 906/1501, he supported the Şūfīs who called for their *shaykh*'s dismissal. Not satisfied with merely sacking al-Suyūfī, however, the sultan wanted him dead, this being a culmination of ill will he harboured since the years before his sultan-ship. Credible reports were circulating indicating that Tūmānbāy threatened to have al-Suyūfī quartered. A warrant was issued for his arrest, but al-Suyūfī, taking advantage of a moment's grace to use the bathroom, managed to slip away from the sultan's emissary. Al-Suyūfī was thenceforth effectively, if not by decree, dismissed from his post at the *khānqah*. He remained in hiding, but not for long, as Tūmānbāy's own head was severed just three months into his rule. Qānşūh al-Ghawrī was much better disposed to al-Suyūfī, and wanted to restore his honour by having him appointed as the *shaykh* of his newly built madrasah at the center of Cairo. But by now the scholar was too bitter from his experiences to choose anything but a

¹¹⁴ Sartain, pp. 94-95.

complete retirement from all public engagement. He thus spent the remaining few years of his life at home on the island al-Rawḍah on the Nile writing and rewriting his books.¹¹⁵

1.5 Spirituality

Al-Suyūṭī's Ṣūfī spiritual side represents an interesting aspect of his thought. His interest in Sufism is indicated by his supervision of Ṣūfīs at two centers of spirituality, by his praise of the Shādhilī Ṣūfī path (*ṭarīqah*), and by his defense of the *khirqah*, a Ṣūfī dress which he himself wore.¹¹⁶

As with mainstream Muslim scholars at the time, al-Suyūṭī took his dreams seriously. According to al-Suyūṭī, in one such dream the Prophet approved of al-Suyūṭī's writing of *Turjumān al-Qur'ān*, al-Suyūṭī's earlier tradition-based *tafsīr*.¹¹⁷ That al-Suyūṭī dreamed of the Prophet Muḥammad is not surprising. What is surprising is al-Suyūṭī's belief that even in a wakeful state he could see the Prophet.¹¹⁸

Even more surprising is that, as depicted in his autobiography, al-Suyūṭī can be seen on occasion praying to the prophet. For example, Sartain cites al-Suyūṭī's account of his contention with the sultan Qāyṭbāy as recorded by al-Shadhilī.¹¹⁹ Al-Suyūṭī warned: "I shall turn to the Apostle of God, may God bless him and grant him salvation, to judge between us and to defend me from him."¹²⁰ Al-Suyūṭī eventually had reason to carry out

¹¹⁵ Sartain, pp. 98-103.

¹¹⁶ Jonathan Brown, *Hadīth: Muḥammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (New York: Oneworld, 2009) pp. 190-91; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Hāwī li-l-fatāwī*, vol. 2, pp 122-23; Sartain, p. 36.

¹¹⁷ *Al-Itqān*, vol. 4, p. 484.

¹¹⁸ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Taḥadduth*, p. 189.

¹¹⁹ Sartain, p. 87.

¹²⁰ Sartain, p. 89.

that threat. He continues: “Then I turned to the apostle of God ... concerning the sultan, and the sultan became ill two days later. His condition worsened until he died on Sunday, the twenty-seventh of the same month (7 August 1496).”¹²¹ These citations betray al-Suyūṭī’s belief that prayers to the prophet are effective. I could not find Sartain or anyone else drawing attention to the peculiar nature of that belief. To me, that belief is one of the most surprising elements of al-Suyūṭī’s thought, and I am puzzled by the silence of the secondary sources in the face of it. To be sure, Sartain did mention in a summary manner, without reference to any specific beliefs, that al-Suyūṭī was superstitious.¹²²

It may be noted, finally, that one aspect of al-Suyūṭī’s character gets repeated mention, such that a summary treatment of his life and thought may seem incomplete without some attention to it. Sartain wrote:

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that al-Suyūṭī’s failure to gain the public recognition which he so craved was due, not to any lack of academic qualifications, but to his proud and cantankerous nature.¹²³

Likewise, Landau-Tasseron wrote: “The case of al-Suyūṭī is perhaps exceptional being as he was peerless in his vanity.”¹²⁴ Chase Robinson’s summation of al-Suyūṭī’s achievements reflects a similar observation about his character:

There is, finally, the great polymath-historian Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, who, in addition to holding two *madrasa* teaching posts, held administrative posts in two Ṣūfī institutions—posts that offered steady salaries, stipends and students. The combination of extraordinary productivity and prolixity ..., breadth ..., and

¹²¹ Sartain, p. 90.

¹²² Sartain, p. 114.

¹²³ Sartain, p. 116.

¹²⁴ Landau-Tasseron, p. 182.

shameless self-promotion . . . , made al-Suyūṭī very controversial. In all of this he represents Mamlūk-era learning at its best and worst.¹²⁵

1.6 Literary Accomplishments

Al-Suyūṭī composed six hundred works, some of which are commonplace in Islamic studies.¹²⁶ According to the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, he is the most prolific writer in all of Islamic history. Roy Jackson, in his *Fifty Key Figures in Islam*, considers al-Suyūṭī one of the most celebrated scholars from the medieval period of Islamic history.¹²⁷ His range of scholarship may be seen from the variety of subjects on which he has left written works. His works span the full spectrum of Islamic studies including *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, History, and Arabic grammar.

Al-Shādhilī subdivides his teacher’s literary productions under the following subject headings: the Qur’ān and its exegesis; *ḥadīth*; the classifications of *ḥadīth*; jurisprudence; the principles of jurisprudence; the principles of the religion; Sufism; language; rhetoric; metaphors; literature; rarities; composition; poetry; history; and a combination of other arts.¹²⁸ In presenting al-Suyūṭī’s biography, Sartain’s purpose was merely to provide a historical outline of the main events in the life of the medieval polymath. She decided that she would make no attempt to evaluate al-Suyūṭī’s works. Rather, Sartain left the proper assessment of the savant’s literary accomplishments to

¹²⁵ Chase Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) pp. 169-70.

¹²⁶ McAuliffe, Jane Dammen, “Exegetical Sciences” in Andrew Rippin, ed. *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur’ān*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006) pp. 403-419, p. 404. Some researchers attribute a larger number of works to al-Suyūṭī. For example, al-Ṭabbā’ lists 1194 titles (pp. 314-405).

¹²⁷ Roy Jackson, *Fifty Key Figures in Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

¹²⁸ Sartain, p. 46.

specialists in various fields.¹²⁹ Given that my objective is to assess al-Suyūṭī's *al-Durr al-manthūr*, it will suffice for me to survey here some of his other significant literary accomplishments.

In his autobiography, al-Suyūṭī listed his works in seven strata in the order of the importance he accords them. In the first stratum are eighteen books which he deems peerless, including four works on exegesis, one of which is the subject of our present study. Of the other three, the first is *al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* (The perfection of the sciences of the Qur'ān).¹³⁰ The second is the now lost "*Turjumān al-Qur'ān* (The interpreter of the Qur'ān)." And the third is *al-Iklīl fī-stinbāṭ al-tanzīl* (The crown-jewels of inferences from the revelation).¹³¹

In the second level are fifty compositions. Al-Suyūṭī does not consider it beyond the competence of other scholars to produce works comparable to his works of this level. In this category he includes three of his significant works on *tafsīr*. The first is the commentary which was begun by al-Maḥallī and was subsequently completed by al-Suyūṭī.¹³² The second is al-Suyūṭī's monograph on the occasions on which various Qur'ānic verses were revealed (*asbāb al-nuzūl*).¹³³ And the third is al-Suyūṭī's *ḥāshiyah* (super-commentary) on the *tafsīr* of al-Bayḍāwī (d. 791/1388).¹³⁴

¹²⁹ Sartain, p. vii.

¹³⁰ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, ed. Sa'īd al-Mandūh (Beirut: Mu'assat al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyyah, 2004).

¹³¹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Iklīl fī-stinbāṭ al-tanzīl*, edited by 'Āmir b. 'Alī al-'Arabī (Jeddah: Dar al-Andalus, 2002).

¹³² Al-Maḥallī, Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad and al-Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr al-jalālayn* (Beirut: Maktabat Lubnān, 2000).

¹³³ Al-Suyūṭī, *Lubāb an-nuqūl fī asbāb al-nuzūl*, ed. Muhammad Muhammad Tamir (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfah al-Dīniyyah, 2004).

In the third category of compositions, al-Suyūṭī lists seventy smaller but noteworthy works ranging in size from two to ten notebooks each. A hundred smaller compositions of a quire each occupy the fourth degree. His fifth category consists of some eighty *fatāwā*, religious verdicts, each penned on more or less a quire. Below this in status are works of the sixth gradation. These are forty compositions he had written either as summaries of the works of others or as notes to lectures he had attended while he was yet a student. He no longer considers these of great worth. Nonetheless, he assures his readers that these works do contain benefits over and above the writings of others.¹³⁵ In this category he included his selections from the exegesis of Ibn Abī Ḥātim, and from the now lost exegesis of al-Firyābī.¹³⁶

Obviously, al-Suyūṭī had the time not only to write, but also to keep track of his compositions, even his unfinished ones. Of the seventh rank are eighty-three works which al-Suyūṭī had begun, but which he eventually lost interest in completing.¹³⁷ Interesting for our study is the first title in this subdivision: *Majma' al-baḥrayn wa maṭla' al-badrayn* (The meeting of the two seas, and the horizon of the two full moons). This work was to be a compendium of the best of both worlds: *tafsīr* based on tradition and *tafsīr* based on

¹³⁴ Al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwar al-tanzīl wa asrār al-ta'wīl* or *Tafsīr al-Bayḍāwī* ed. Muhammad Abd Al-Rahman al-Mur'ashli (Beirut: Dar Ehia al-Tourath al-Arabi, 1998). At the time of writing his autobiography, the said *ḥāshiyah* was incomplete. (See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Taḥadduth*, p. 107). After completing the *ḥāshiyah*, however, al-Suyūṭī increased his estimation of its worth (see al-Shādhilī, *Bahjat al-'ābidīn*, p. 122).

¹³⁵ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Taḥadduth*, p. 126.

¹³⁶ Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr Ibn Abī Ḥātim* (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob Al-Ilmiya, 2006) 7 vols.; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Taḥadduth*, p. 127.

¹³⁷ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Taḥadduth*, p. 129.

opinion.¹³⁸ However, al-Suyūṭī informs his readers that he had abandoned the project after writing a few exercise books on the Qur’ān’s first chapter, and a commentary on the 108th chapter.¹³⁹

Since my study is of al-Suyūṭī’s *ḥadīth*-based exegesis, it will be useful to mention here some of his major works on *ḥadīth*. That he was a master of the discipline there is no doubt. His students were convinced that their teacher had memorized two hundred thousand *aḥādīth*. His *Jam’ al-Jawāmi’* is certainly a large stock of *aḥādīth* spanning many volumes, though it remains incomplete. A summary of this work, done by the author himself, is *al-Jāmi’ al-ṣaḡhīr* which contains a thousand *aḥādīth*. Al-Suyūṭī also wrote *al-Tawshīḥ*, a commentary on al-Bukhārī’s *al-Jāmi’ al-ṣaḡhīh*.¹⁴⁰

1.7 Unique views

In addition to the controversies mentioned above, al-Suyūṭī in his autobiography details several other controversies in which he was embroiled. I will now mention some of these controversies. First, before describing the acrimonious debates he had with his contemporaries, al-Suyūṭī assures his readers of his impartiality by providing a detailed refutation of a *fatwā* once given by his father. He argues that, had he been partial, his father would have been spared his criticism. After all, he loves his father. Yet such love cannot stand in the way of truth. Hence his opposition to his contemporaries should not be taken personally. Rather, he wants it to be understood that his main purpose has

¹³⁸ See *al-Taḥadduth bi-ni’mat Allāh*, p. 129; *The Itqān*, vol. 2, p. 476.

¹³⁹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Taḥadduth*, p. 129.

¹⁴⁰ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Tawshīḥ sharḥ jāmi’ al-ṣaḡhīh: sharḥ ṣaḡhīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd, 1998).

always been to serve the cause of knowledge. He adds that God has proscribed the concealment of knowledge, and has blessed him with the ability of performing *ijtihād* which he must now apply in renewing the religion.¹⁴¹ Al-Khuḍayrī, the senior al-Suyūṭī, was asked whether the life spans of individuals are precisely predetermined, or whether some flexibility remains in this regard. Al-Khuḍayrī gave the common Sunnī answer that the date of one's death is irrevocably determined. He bolstered his answer with reference to several Qur'ānic verses.

But the junior al-Suyūṭī respectfully differs, he too referring to several Qur'ānic verses, including Qur'ān 13:39. Al-Suyūṭī argues that the age of a person can increase or decrease in response to prayers; moreover, on a special night of Ramadan, the night of power, God makes further determinations affecting life and death. In support of this position he provides many citations from the Qur'ān, the *ḥadīth*, and traditional commentaries on the Qur'ān including those of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Abī Ḥātim. What does not change, according to al-Suyūṭī, is God's eternal knowledge. But the written decree, which is available to the angels, is subject to divine intervention.¹⁴² Al-Suyūṭī's view of determinism is therefore significantly nuanced.

Second, according to a widely held interpretation, the late afternoon (*'asr*) prayer is meant by the reference to the middle prayer (*al-ṣalāt al-wuṣṭā*) in Qur'ān 2:238. However, al-Suyūṭī recalls that in the year 879 he had presented in a lecture as many as

¹⁴¹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Taḥadduth*, p. 20.

¹⁴² Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Taḥadduth*, pp. 20-31.

twenty opinions on what was meant by that reference to the middle prayer.¹⁴³ In the same lecture, al-Suyūfī announced his interpretation that the verse refers to the early afternoon (*ẓuhr*) prayer. And he followed this announcement with clear proofs. Yet, according to al-Suyūfī, a certain ignoramus began stirring up popular sentiment against him, claiming that it is the late afternoon (*'asr*) prayer to which the verse refers.¹⁴⁴

Third, in the year 888/1484, a controversy arose between two *amīrs* over the meaning of the Qur'ānic reference (92:17) to *al-atqā* (the person who is most pious). Some exegetes, fascinated with *ta'yīn al-mubham* (finding specific referents for general indicators) had identified Abū Bakr as having received divine approval in that verse.¹⁴⁵ One *amīr* was thus convinced that Abū Bakr was the man. The other insisted that the statement is quite general, and therefore refers to the most pious persons, not necessarily to Abū Bakr. The matter was put to scholars for their opinions. The scholar al-Jawjarī conceded that the verse was initially revealed in praise of Abū Bakr. But al-Jawjarī added that the verse's wording is in fact general, and it therefore applies just as well to other pious persons. In support of his answer, al-Jawjarī cited a known interpretive principle. He argued that the lesson derived from a verse is to be based on the generality of its

¹⁴³ A discussion of this verse is found in Aisha Geissinger's doctoral dissertation, "Gendering the Classical Tradition of Qur'ān Exegesis: Literary Representations and Textual Authority in Medieval Islam," (University Press of Toronto, 2008) pp. 210-270. Geissinger was concerned about the way in which the gender of the narrators of textual variations and Qur'ānic elaborations played a role in the shaping of subsequent exegetical opinions. I will be concerned with al-Suyūfī's representation of his own opinion in the form of a strictly traditional commentary which, by definition, should be neutral with regards to the compiler's opinion.

¹⁴⁴ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Taḥadduth*, p. 164.

¹⁴⁵ This is the sort of exegesis Goldziher regarded as sectarian. See Ignaz Goldziher, *Schools of Koranic Commentators*, Trans. Wolfgang H. Behn (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006). For the application of the phenomenon to the verse in question, see pp. 193-94. Among the controversies that followed the death of Muḥammad, the question of his succession was quite troubling to Muslims. Supporters of Abū Bakr's caliphate cited the said verse in his favour.

wording, not on the specific circumstance of its revelation (*al- 'ibratu bi- 'umūmi-l-lafz lā bi khuṣūṣi-l-sabab*).¹⁴⁶ But al-Suyūṭī, not satisfied with this answer, wrote a refutation to it.¹⁴⁷ For al-Suyūṭī, what is at stake here is more than just the meaning of the verse. He is worried that the allowance given by al-Jawjarī weakens the claim of Abū Bakr to the caliphate, and thus strengthens the position of the Shī'īs whom he refers to as *rāfiḍīs* (deniers).¹⁴⁸ It added much to al-Suyūṭī's frustration that al-Jawjarī, oblivious to a *ḥadīth*'s designation of Abū Bakr as the sole referent of Qur'ān 92:17, refused to likewise restrict the designation.¹⁴⁹

Fourth, al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) had become the subject of some renewed controversy over his statement that no better universe is possible than what has been created (*laysa fi-l-imkān abda' min mā kān*).¹⁵⁰ Al-Suyūṭī complained that even his contemporary al-Biqā'ī (d. 885/1480) joined in criticizing al-Ghazālī for that statement. To al-Biqā'ī, al-Ghazālī seemed to have adopted a mistaken view based on the principles of the philosophers (*falāsifah*) and of the rationalists (*mu'tazilah*). While he was in Damascus, al-Biqā'ī wrote a treatise on this problem, but his treatise met with such strong resistance that the masses there almost killed him. He had to hide at home and not venture out even for the Friday prayers. He sent his work to Cairo to get the supporting

¹⁴⁶ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Taḥadduth*, p. 187.

¹⁴⁷ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Taḥadduth*, p. 186-87.

¹⁴⁸ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Taḥadduth*, p. 188.

¹⁴⁹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Taḥadduth*, p. 186.

¹⁵⁰ For a discussion on the controversy this generated, see Eric L. Ormsby, *Theodicy in Islamic thought: the dispute over al-Ghazālī's "best of all possible worlds"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

signatures of the scholars there, and al-Jawjarī ratified it. Al-Jawjarī added that al-Ghazālī’s statement is based on the *mu’tazilī* principle that God must create that which is most excellent (*qawl al-mu’tazilah bi-wujub al-aṣlah*).

Eventually, the tractate reached al-Suyūṭī for his comment. To al-Suyūṭī, it was not plausible to suggest that al-Ghazālī adopted a *mu’tazilī* principle either knowingly or unwittingly. According to al-Suyūṭī, al-Ghazālī was too well schooled in Theology to make such a mistake. Moreover, al-Ghazālī had spent his life refuting innovators, especially the *mu’tazilah*. Therefore al-Suyūṭī intended to take all of al-Ghazālī’s words into consideration, pondering them letter for letter. Al-Suyūṭī thus aimed at finding a way of interpreting the controversial statement in conformity with the principles of the *Ahl al-Sunnah*. As was his usual practice in handling such controversies, al-Suyūṭī wrote a paper on the subject. He also wrote a shorter paper for wider circulation thus popularizing his defense of al-Ghazālī.¹⁵¹

Fifth, Qur’ān 75:23 speaks of believers looking at their Lord in the life hereafter, and one might presume that both male and female believers are intended by that verse. However, when al-Suyūṭī was asked if it is established that women will see God in the life hereafter, he gave a surprising answer. He replied that there are different opinions on the question, but the preferred view is that women will not see God except on the days of *‘Īd* (festival days). Of course al-Suyūṭī’s answer was predicated on his careful consideration of every *ḥadīth* he could find on the issue. He could not find even a weak *ḥadīth* mentioning that the weekly viewings which men will enjoy will also be available to women. Before long, however, the questioner reported to al-Suyūṭī that other scholars,

¹⁵¹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Taḥadduth*, p. 188.

having disagreed with al-Suyūṭī's verdict, suggested that the matter be addressed to yet other scholars in the country. But al-Suyūṭī spared no time in producing a pamphlet and a shorter circular defending his view on the question.¹⁵²

Such were the heated controversies which al-Suyūṭī describes in his autobiography. Moreover, after concluding the chronological account of his life, al-Suyūṭī includes a chapter (chapter 20) in which he summarizes some of the choices (*ikhṭiyārāt*) he has made among competing views on questions of Islamic Law. I will now briefly recount some of these controversial choices.

First, al-Suyūṭī mentions his view that after a woman's period ends what makes sexual intercourse with her husband legal is not necessarily a *ghusl* (a complete bath) but merely *instinjā'* (her washing of the private area). Al-Suyūṭī confesses that his ruling at this point is contrary to the Shāfi'ī *madhhab*.¹⁵³ His ruling is, however, based on his interpretation of an authoritative reading of Qur'ān 2:222.

Second, al-Suyūṭī opposed al-Shāfi'ī's ruling that the prayer (*ṣalāt*) is invalid without the recitation of the *basmalah* at the beginning of the Fātiḥah (the Qur'ān's first *sūrah*).¹⁵⁴ At the heart of the issue is the fact that, whereas the *basmalah* is normally written at the head of every *sūrah* except the ninth, disagreement remains as to whether or not it is integral to the *sūrahs*. Al-Suyūṭī concedes that, according to some acceptable readings (*aḥruf*) of the Qur'ān, the *basmalah* is indeed an integral part of those Qur'ānic

¹⁵² Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Taḥadduth*, pp. 190-192.

¹⁵³ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Taḥadduth*, p. 228.

¹⁵⁴ Sartain, pp. 213-14, n. 5. The *basmalah* refers to the formula: In the Name of God the Beneficent, the Merciful.

chapters at the head of which it has been written in the codices.¹⁵⁵ However, he adds that according to some other equally acceptable readings the *basmalah* is not an integral part of those *sūrahs*. He adds that these various acceptable reading traditions have been established on the basis of *mutawātir* testimony—the testimony of several reciters in every era. Hence both the inclusion of the *basmalah* in the Qur’ānic *sūrahs* and the exclusion of the *basmalah* have been settled on the basis of firm evidence.¹⁵⁶ Therefore the prayer is valid either with or without the *basmalah*.

Third, al-Suyūfī pronounced controversial verdicts on several questions pertaining to the correct observance of the Friday prayers. He rules that the Friday prayer is validly held in only a single location in a city even if the city is large and the gathering is tight. He notes that some respectable scholars have permitted the practice of multiplying the prayer locations due to necessity. However, al-Suyūfī maintains that such a ruling is not only contrary to the Shāfi‘ī school but may even be contrary to consensus (*ijmā’*). He adds that if the prayer is offered in more places than one, then the valid prayer will be the one performed in the old mosque.¹⁵⁷ But more generally, aside from the question of the plurality of prayer locations, the Friday prayer will be validly held if the gathering consists of at least four persons including the *imām*. He adds that this is an old opinion of Imām al-Shāfi‘ī.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Here I translate *aḥruf* as ‘readings’. However, for a more complex discussion of the subject, see below, Chapter 7.

¹⁵⁶ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Taḥadduth*, p. 229.

¹⁵⁷ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Taḥadduth*, p. 230.

¹⁵⁸ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Taḥadduth*, p. 229.

Fourth, in the same section of al-Suyūṭī's autobiography, a couple of his rulings show a certain degree of flexibility on his part with regards to the timing of the prayers. The first such ruling is that if one fears being overcome by sleep prior to the late-night prayer (*'ishā'*) then one can offer it within the time of the early night prayer (*maghrib*).¹⁵⁹ The second such ruling is that the permission to combine two prayers is not limited to those who are on a journey but is also open to those who are ill. He adds that such combined prayers can be offered either in the earlier or in the later of the two prayer times.¹⁶⁰

Fifth, al-Suyūṭī writes that “one who abandons the prayer (*salāh*) should not be killed, but only warned by way of lesser penalties such as imprisonment, beating, and the like.”¹⁶¹ While this is still a harsh ruling, it is a reprieve from the ruling that the crime is capital—a ruling which the Ḥanbalīs have obtained from some *ḥadīths*, and which some exegetes have inferred from their reading of two verses of the Qur'ān (9:5, 11). Al-Suyūṭī avoids that common inference.

Sixth, some of al-Suyūṭī's rulings show his sternness against those who would dare to insult the Prophet and his close circle. Al-Suyūṭī rules that one who insults (*sābb*) Muḥammad or any other prophet should be certainly killed, this being a mandatory sentence (*ḥadd*). And, as is the case with other such *ḥudūd*, the repentance of the culprit will not mitigate the punishment. Likewise, a slanderer (*qādhif*) of 'Ā'isha or any other of the mothers of the believers (the wives of the prophet) is to be killed as a mandatory

¹⁵⁹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Taḥadduth*, p. 229.

¹⁶⁰ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Taḥadduth*, p. 231.

¹⁶¹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Taḥadduth*, p. 231.

punishment. On the other hand “if anyone insults (*sābb*) Abū Bakr and ‘Umar he should be killed if he persists—this being one of two opinions—but on his repentance the punishment will be waived.”¹⁶² Moreover, anyone who commits highway robbery should be killed (*kullu man sa‘ā fī-l-arḍ bi-l-fasād yuqtal*).¹⁶³ And one who drinks wine is to be killed on the fourth conviction.¹⁶⁴

Such rulings inform us about al-Suyūṭī’s legal dispositions and affiliations. He is clearly of the Shāfi‘ī school of Islamic jurisprudence. His rulings and interpretations are largely constrained by the boundaries of that school—boundaries he has dared to test from time to time. His traditionalism is evident from his reliance on *ḥadīth* in determining the meanings of Qur’ānic verses. In sum, as noted by Sartain, al-Suyūṭī proves to be the most controversial figure in his time.¹⁶⁵ And whereas we cannot capture in this single study all the nuances of his thought, we can form a fair idea of his *tafsīr*. At first glance, *al-Durr al-manthūr*’s formal features give it the appearance of a neutral collection of traditional reports. However, al-Suyūṭī was at the centre of much controversy, and he would have had to exercise considerable restraint to not let such controversies colour his exegesis.

¹⁶² Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Taḥadduth*, p. 233.

¹⁶³ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Taḥadduth*, p. 233.

¹⁶⁴ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Taḥadduth*, p. 233.

¹⁶⁵ Sartain, p. 72.

Chapter 2

The Composition of *al-Durr al-manthūr*

2.1 The Author at Work

It is not unusual to find major exegetes from al-Ṭabarī (d. 311/923) to al-Qāsimī (d. 1322/1904) prefacing their works with lengthy discussions of their hermeneutics.¹⁶⁶ However, al-Suyūṭī's introduction to his work is surprisingly brief. He has said little about the purposes for which he composed *al-Durr al-manthūr*, and about the working methods he employed. In this chapter I survey the structure of al-Suyūṭī's text. I also begin my investigation of al-Suyūṭī's authorial intent. Moreover, I identify some of the most important sources which al-Suyūṭī used—both stated and unacknowledged sources.

2.2 The Structure of *al-Durr*

After presenting an introduction to *al-Durr*, al-Suyūṭī began his exegesis of the Qur'ān's first chapter by scribing its title: “*Sūrat fātiḥati-l-kitāb* (The chapter of the opening of the scripture).”¹⁶⁷ Below this title, al-Suyūṭī lists several pages of traditions dealing with preliminary introductory issues pertaining to the *sūra* as a whole. Then he proceeds to deal specifically with the first verse of the *sūra* under the caption ‘*Qawliḥ ta'ālā: bismillāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*’ (His saying, be he exalted, “In the Name of God,

¹⁶⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr. *Jāmi al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān: tafsīr al-Ṭabarī* (Beirut: Iḥya al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 2001); Muḥammad Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, *Tafsīr al-Qāsimī* (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabīyah, 1957-70) 17 vols.

¹⁶⁷ *Al-Durr*, vol. 1, p. 5.

the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy”). His exegesis of this opening formula occupies several pages.

Al-Suyūṭī’s exegesis of that Qur’ānic lemma takes the form of a long list of traditions having some bearing on its meaning. The traditions also touch upon broader questions, such as the question of canonicity of that lemma, and whether or not that lemma is to be recited aloud in the ritual prayers. Each *ḥadīth* is preceded by a list of the books from which it is derived and the name of the earliest authority to whom the *ḥadīth* is credited. If that authority is Muḥammad, then the Companion who narrated the *ḥadīth* on his authority is also given. No comment follows the traditions. The author’s voice is thus almost completely muted. Al-Suyūṭī proceeds in this fashion throughout his exegesis. He would mention a verse at a time, or a part of a long verse, followed by a string of traditions which purportedly serve to explain the verse or segment. Occasionally, al-Suyūṭī mentions, in passing, a judgement on the soundness of the tradition. Such a judgement is often derived from the very sources that furnished the *ḥadīth*. On a few rare occasions, a half-dozen times throughout the entire fifteen volumes, al-Suyūṭī prefaces such a verdict with the confession *qultu* (I say).

Al-Suyūṭī has thus covered the entire Qur’ān sequentially, dealing with each chapter in turn, though he passed over some Qur’ānic verses within individual chapters. *Al-Durr* therefore has the appearance of being a collection of *ḥadīths* arranged according to their relevance to Qur’ānic lemmata. The Qur’ānic segments stand in the place of the topical headings in a typical *ḥadīth* collection.

After dealing with the last *sūra*, al-Suyūṭī attached an epilogue in which he included three elements that I have not seen in other works of Qur’ānic exegesis. The first

two elements are preceded by appropriate captions, and hence appear as distinct sections. The first caption reads: *Dhikr ma warada fī sūrat al-khal' wa sūrat al-ḥafd* (A mention of what has transpired with reference to *sūrat al-khal'* and *sūrat al-ḥafd*). Al-Suyūṭī is referring here to two Qur'ānic chapters, which, in addition to the canonical one hundred and fourteen, were known to exist in the *muṣḥaf* (codex) of Ubayy b. Ka'b. Al-Suyūṭī's treatment of these chapters as the subject of exegesis reveals two of his unique interests. He had a unique interest in questions about the boundaries of the Qur'ānic canon, and in alternative readings which were credited to Ubayy and other notable early Qur'ānic reciters. As he noted in his *Itqān*, al-Suyūṭī was interested in establishing that the varieties of readings have given rise to an acceptable multiplicity of meanings of the Qur'ānic text.¹⁶⁸

The second caption reads: *Dhikr du'ā' khatmi-l-Qur'ān* (A mention of the supplication to be offered at the end of the Qur'ān). Al-Suyūṭī then provides an exegesis of that popular supplication. In making a commonly recited supplication the subject of exegesis, he has attempted to add a unique element to the stream of Qur'ānic exegesis. However, I have not found any exegete after him doing likewise. Usually, the last subject matter of exegesis in *tafsīr* works is the last verse of the canonical Qur'ān (Qur'ān 114:6). Al-Suyūṭī's book thus remains a *sui generis* for uniquely providing an exegesis of the closing supplication.

¹⁶⁸ See the *Itqān*, vols. 3-4, pp. 484-85.

The third of the three elements in al-Suyūṭī's epilogue is a lengthy citation from Ibn Ḥajar's introduction to the latter's book on the occasions of Qur'ānic revelation.¹⁶⁹ Al-Suyūṭī did not place a caption over this citation to mark it off as the beginning of a new section of his epilogue. However, I identify it as a new section due to the length of the citation, and the change of subject matter it represents as distinct from the exegesis of the above mentioned supplication. The citation from Ibn Ḥajar contains a description of some early works of Qur'ānic exegesis. Of most relevance to the present study is the mention of four works which turn out to be the main sources for the composition of *al-Durr*. I will identify these four works below where I discuss more fully their significance for the study of *al-Durr*.

Al-Suyūṭī noted at the end of *al-Durr* that he has finished preparing its final version (literally its clean copy) on the day of *Eid al-Fiṭr* of the year eight hundred and ninety eight.¹⁷⁰ This we know to be thirteen years before his death.

2.3 Al-Suyūṭī's Introduction to *al-Durr*

We return now to al-Suyūṭī's introduction to *al-Durr* where we find some indicators of authorial intent. The author's introduction in the printed editions of *al-Durr* is very short for an exegetical work of this magnitude. After offering a doxology that is not unusual in traditional Muslim works, al-Suyūṭī sets forth a description of *al-Durr*:

I had composed the book *Turjumān al-Qur'ān*, that being the exegesis that relies on the authority of the prophet and his companions. It was completed—God be

¹⁶⁹ Ibn Ḥajar, *al-'Ujāb fī bayān al-asbāb* ed. Fawwāz Aḥmad Zamarī (Beirut: Dar ibn Ḥazm, 2002).

¹⁷⁰ This corresponds to the first day of the month of *Shawwāl* in the lunar calendar. That the author would be working in his book on the day of the festival is an indication of his preoccupation with scholarly activity. *Al-Durr*, vol. 15, p. 825.

praised for this—in [a few] volumes. The book contained, together with the traditions I included, also the chains of tradents leading from the compilations from which I gathered the traditions [to the prophet and his companions]. But I noticed a lack of zeal [on the part of readers] to study the book, and their desire for a version that is shortened to the traditions without their exhaustive chains of tradents. Hence from that work I prepared this summary version limited to the texts of the traditions. But I do attribute the traditions to each sourcebook worthy of note. I have named my work *al-Durr al-manthūr fī-l-tafsīr bi-l-ma'thūr*.¹⁷¹

Following that description of his work, al-Suyūṭī ends his introduction with prayers for the book's reception and for divine providence. In that introduction, the author reveals something about the evolution of his compilation and some salient features of the work. Al-Suyūṭī informs his readers that he had summarized this book from a previous exegetical tome of the same genre. Between benedictions and prayers, he writes that he had previously composed *Turjumān al-Qur'ān*, a *tafsīr* based on information linked to the Messenger of God and his companions. That earlier work had spanned several volumes (*mujalladāt*).¹⁷² Those volumes contained not only the said narratives, but also the chains of narrators (*asānīd*) linking the information either to the prophet or to his companions. But despite the obvious value of such a work, the author noticed a certain lack of interest on the part of his contemporaries in studying his book. He found that his contemporaries desired to read the narratives in a shortened form devoid of the narrative chains—especially since such chains tend to be lengthy. Responding to this need, al-Suyūṭī then prepared the present summary version: *al-Durr al-manthūr*. In *al-*

¹⁷¹ *Al-Durr*, Introduction, pp.3-4 (translation mine).

¹⁷² He does not specify how many.

Durr he has presented the narratives shorn of their *isnāds*, but replete with indications of every worthy source from which the narratives are derived.¹⁷³

Al-Suyūṭī's introduction to his work lacks some vital information. Little is said of the hermeneutical underpinnings of the exegetical endeavour. The author has merely confessed to having composed a tradition-based exegesis and then to have summarized it. But he furnishes no explanation here of the principles which underlie the said genre of exegesis and the characteristics which distinguish this genre of exegesis from other genres. Nor has he explained how his *al-Durr* differs from other works of the same genre. Moreover, he said nothing about the principles which guided his selection and arrangement of the traditions which he has decided to include in his exegetical tome.

An immediate problem arising out of the introduction is the enigmatic relationship between *al-Durr* and al-Suyūṭī's earlier *tafsīr* of the same genre: *Turjumān al Qur'ān*. As Goldziher noted, the stock of *ḥadīths* is a bottomless pit, and its use in Qur'ānic exegesis can produce a work as large as al-Suyūṭī's former work, *Turjumān al Qur'ān*, which contained more than ten thousand traditions.¹⁷⁴ Goldziher took al-Suyūṭī at his word that *al-Durr* is an abridgement of *Turjumān al Qur'ān*.¹⁷⁵ However, *al-Durr* includes a far greater stock of traditions than does *Turjumān al Qur'ān*. The summary is surprisingly larger than its source, and hence must be characterized rather as an expansion of the former work. The extent of this problem will presently become clear.

¹⁷³ *Al-Durr*, vol. 1, pp. 3-4.

¹⁷⁴ Goldziher, p. 42. That this was the number of traditions in the *Turjumān* is expressed by Al-Suyūṭī in several of his works including *Tadrīb al-rāwī fī sharḥ taqrīb al-Nawawī* (Beirut: Mu'assat al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyyah, 2003) p. 98.

¹⁷⁵ Goldziher, p. 42, n. 38.

The most significant edition of *al-Durr* used in the present study is that prepared by al-Turkī and published in 1424/2003 by Markaz al-Ḥajr in Cairo.¹⁷⁶ This edition marks a considerable advance in the study of *al-Durr*. The editor has provided notes on the sources of individual traditions mentioned in the commentary along with judgments on the authenticity of the said narratives using the terminology of traditional *ḥadīth* sciences. Some introductory information is also provided on the personages mentioned in the commentary.¹⁷⁷ Although al-Turkī's editorial activity greatly facilitates the further study of the voluminous *al-Durr*, his edition is unfortunately out of print. However, an electronic non-searchable version is available online.¹⁷⁸

The present study has also relied largely on *al-Marji' al-akbar li-l-turāth al-Islāmī*, a DVD collection of classical Arabic books spanning the spectrum of religious sciences, history, and poetry.¹⁷⁹ Containing a massive library boasting 12,500 books in searchable electronic form, *al-Marji'* is especially useful for locating specific items within individual books, and for comparing items occurring in various books. The edition of *al-Durr* contained in this collection is the one published by Dar-al Fikr in Beirut in seven volumes.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁶ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr fī-l-tafsīr bi-l-ma'thūr*, ed. Abdullah b. Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (Markaz al-Ḥajr li-l-Buhūth wa-l-Dirāsāt al-'Arabīyyah wa-l-Islāmīyyah, 1424/2003) 17 vols. On the publication history of *al-Durr*, see al-Turkī's introduction to his edition, vol. 1, pp. 59-60; Ḥaydar, pp. 244-45; and al-Shurbajī, pp. 248-49.

¹⁷⁷ The exegesis spans fifteen volumes the sum of whose pages is 10,962 for an average of approximately 731 pages per volume. To these fifteen volumes the editor has added another two containing comprehensive appendices spread over 1,740 pages.

¹⁷⁸ <http://www.archive.org/details/eldorrelmanthor>: accessed September 26, 2010.

¹⁷⁹ *Al-Marji' al-akbar li-l-turāth al-Islāmī*, 2nd edition, DVD (Beirut, Elariss, no date).

¹⁸⁰ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1993) 7 vols.

No edition of *al-Durr* numbers the traditions it contains. But from the above resources it is possible to form a reasonable estimate of the number of traditions presented in *al-Durr*. This is due to the fact that al-Suyūṭī uses an invariable style in naming the sources of his traditions. Under each Qur’ānic statement, al-Suyūṭī writes that such and such named authorities compiled (*akhraja*) the tradition.¹⁸¹ While introducing subsequent traditions under the same Qur’ānic statement, al-Suyūṭī uses identical wording, but now with the addition of the conjoining particle *wa* (and). Hence the number of traditions in *al-Durr* can be estimated as the total of the number of occurrences of *akhraja* (he compiled) and the number of occurrences of *wa-akhraja* (and he compiled).¹⁸² On a quick search, one discovers 2,767 occurrences of *akhraja*, and 34,691 instances of *wa-akhraja* thus indicating a total of 37,691 traditions.¹⁸³

That total is not the final result, since al-Suyūṭī has repeated some traditions at multiple locations in his exegesis. I will now make an adjustment for such repetitions. Al-Turkī’s indices to the traditions list each tradition as a single entry while noting the number of times it occurs. There are two indices, one for the *ḥadīths* that attribute direct speech to the prophet (*al-aḥādīth al-qawlīyya*), and another for all other traditions (*al-*

¹⁸¹ In this context, al-Suyūṭī always mentions the verb *akhraja* before naming the compilers of a tradition. Thus, in accordance with Arabic grammar, the verb is always singular even when the named compilers of the tradition are several.

¹⁸² This does not involve a double-count of the verb since the conjoining particle is written together with the verb and the two together are thus counted as a single word. Searches for *akhraja* do not return results for *wa-akhraja*; and vice-versa.

¹⁸³ This number will be brought into perspective in comparison with the number of traditions in al-Ṭabarī’s *tafsīr*. Herbert Berg in his *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000) has given the number of traditions in *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī* as being 38,397 (p. 124) and as 38,388 (p. 209). Hence al-Suyūṭī’s exegesis contains almost as many traditions as that of al-Ṭabarī.

aḥādīth ghayr al-qawlīyya wa-l-āthār). These two indices together contain a total of approximately 28,428 traditions.¹⁸⁴

We have seen above that, inclusive of repetitions, these 28,428 traditions occupy a total of 37,691 occurrences. If these data are correct, then most of the traditions found in *al-Durr* must occur only once. Indeed, on thumbing through al-Turkī's indices, one finds that this is the case. Seldom does a tradition occur twice; and rarely does a tradition occur three times or more. My estimate of 28,428 as the number of traditions in *al-Durr* is thus reasonable. It is therefore clear that the current work contains a much larger stock of traditions than the mere ten thousand or so which al-Suyūfī said was contained in his earlier work—the *Turjumān*. Hence it is difficult for *al-Durr* to pass as a précis of the earlier work.

Moreover, it is clear that the number of volumes of *al-Durr* exceeds the number of volumes of the supposedly larger work—the *Turjumān*. Ḥāzīm Sa'īd Ḥaydar drew attention to this problem and proposed a solution which we will presently examine.¹⁸⁵ Al-Suyūfī mentioned in his *al-Itqān* that he had compiled the *Turjumān* in four volumes as a

¹⁸⁴ This total was deduced as follows. The first index begins at page number 92 in the sixteenth volume and ends on page 492 for a difference of 401 pages inclusive. The second list begins immediately thereafter but continues well into page 1,355 in the seventeenth volume, for a total of 862 pages. The number of traditions per page is not uniform. Leaving aside page 92, which is irregular due to its sectional heading, page 93 contains 21 entries; page 94 contains 25 entries; and page 95 contains 24 entries. Thus the three pages contain an average of approximately 23 traditions each. This reasonable estimate of traditions per page can now be extrapolated over the total number of pages in the indices listing these traditions. In this way, *al-Durr* is found to contain roughly 9,223 *ḥadīths* (23 x 401) attributing words to Islam's prophet, and 19,826 other traditions (23 x 862). That makes for a sum of 28,428 traditions.

¹⁸⁵ Ḥāzīm Sa'īd Ḥaydar, "*Muqaddimat tafsīr al-durr al-manthūr li-l-Suyūfī bayna-l-makḥḥūt wa-l-maḥbū'*," *Majallat al-buḥūth wa-l-dirāsāt al-Qur'ānīya*, Year 1, Issue 1 (2006) 231-301, p. 242. Haydar is a researcher at the Centre for Qur'ānic Studies at the King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur'ān in Medina.

collection of more than ten thousand reports from the Prophet and his companions.¹⁸⁶ In another work, al-Suyūfī mentioned that he had compiled the *Turjumān* in five volumes.¹⁸⁷ In yet another work, al-Suyūfī mentioned that *al-Durr* comprised twelve large volumes.¹⁸⁸ Two questions arise here. First, why did al-Suyūfī refer to the *Turjumān* on one occasion as comprising four volumes and on the other occasion as comprising five volumes? Second, how has the book grown from less than half-a-dozen bindings to a dozen large ones while al-Suyūfī claims that he was summarizing the text?

Leaving aside the first question, Ḥaydar tackles the second. He finds a clue as he compares al-Suyūfī’s description of the *Turjumān* with our present knowledge of *al-Durr*. Al-Suyūfī did say, as cited, that the upwards of ten thousand traditions of the *Turjumān* were distributed between the categories of *marfū’* and *mawqūf*.¹⁸⁹ But, in addition to reports of these two varieties, Ḥaydar notices that *al-Durr* contains traditions which are *maqṭū’*.¹⁹⁰ Ḥaydar suggests that al-Suyūfī was doing two things at once. First, al-Suyūfī was contracting the book by casting off the chains of authorities for the traditions it contains. Second, al-Suyūfī was expanding the book by adding traditions attributed to authorities below those of Muḥammad and Muḥammad’s companions. The precise

¹⁸⁶ *Al-Itqān*, vol. 4, p. 484.

¹⁸⁷ Ḥaydar citing al-Suyūfī, *Qaṭf al-azhār* vol. 1, p. 89.

¹⁸⁸ Al-Shadhili, *Bahjat al-‘ābidīn*, p. 175.

¹⁸⁹ *Marfū’* means, literally, ‘raised’; i.e. raised to the level of the prophet’s authority. These would include reports about what the prophet said or did, or in what he acquiesced. *Mawqūf* means, literally, ‘stopped’; i.e. stopped short of the prophet and thus remaining at the level of his companions. For a definition of these *ḥadīth* terms see Al-Suyūfī, *Tadrīb al-rāwī* cited above, pp. 92-98. Secondary academic writings in English rarely define these terms. But see Abdul Hameed Siddiqui’s introduction to his trans. of *Mishkāt al-maṣābīh*, vol. 1, pp. xv – xvi; and James Robson’s introduction to his trans. of the same, vol. 1, pp. viii to xii.

¹⁹⁰ Lit. ‘cut’; i.e. cut off at the level of the successors of the companions.

verification of Ḥaydar’s solution would require that we revisit the categorization of reports. We estimated above that 19,826 traditions in *al-Durr* were attributed to authorities other than Muḥammad. We now need to ascertain how many of those 19,826 traditions were attributed to Muḥammad’s companions. However, such an investigation is beyond the scope of this study. It suffices to conclude here that, despite al-Suyūṭī’s assertion, *al-Durr* was not a mere summary of the *Turjumān*.

In view of al-Suyūṭī’s varied descriptions of the *Turjumān*, and of the larger size of its supposed summary, another question arises. Was the *Turjumān* released for publication as a finished work, or was it a work-in-progress that gradually developed into *al-Durr*? The complete absence of the *Turjumān* would suggest that it was not a finished work. It is unlikely that a work of the nature of the *Turjumān* should be lost, valuable as it would have been in a period of active scholarship so relatively close to our own time. According to al-Shurbajī, *al-Durr* is the only exegesis that limits itself to *tafsīr bi-l-ma’thūr*.¹⁹¹ Had the *Turjumān* been released by its author, it would have been cherished and copied as the sole representative of *tafsīr* of its genre prior to the writing of *al-Durr*. The chains of narrators accompanying every *ḥadīth* contained in the *Turjumān* would have proved valuable to scholars even if boring to laypersons. Hence the *Turjumān* would have survived along with *al-Durr*.

2.4 Al-Suyūṭī’s Purpose in Composing a Tradition-based Exegesis

In his introduction to *al-Durr*, al-Suyūṭī explained why he decided to summarize his tradition-based exegesis, but not why he decided in the first instance to write a *tafsīr*

¹⁹¹ Al-Shurbajī, p. 256.

of the said genre. However, an indirect indication of the factors that prompted the composition of his tradition-based exegesis is found in the *Itqān*. The *Itqān* comprises eighty chapters. The seventy-eighth chapter is entitled: “On the knowledge of the prerequisites and the etiquettes of an exegete.”¹⁹² In that chapter, al-Suyūṭī discusses the difference between two main types of exegesis: one based on tradition; the other based on reason.¹⁹³ Arguing at length that both types are valid, he declares that he has already compiled a *tafsīr* based on tradition:

I have compiled a *musnad* book in which are the exegeses of the prophet and his companions. It contains more than ten thousand traditions: some being *marfūʿ*; others *mawqūf*. This has been completed—God be praised—in four volumes. I have named the book *Turjumān al-Qurʿān*. During the period of its composition, I saw the prophet in a vision, this being a long story that includes a glad tidings.¹⁹⁴

Al-Suyūṭī then argues that this type of *tafsīr* is a prerequisite for embarking on reason-based exegesis, since one must take stock of the tradition before exercising one’s opinion. To claim expertise in reason-based exegesis without mastery of the tradition-based type, he explains, is like claiming to have entered the inner chamber of a house without traversing the foyer.¹⁹⁵

Al-Suyūṭī once intended to write another *tafsīr*: a work that would have embraced both reason and tradition. Unfortunately, al-Suyūṭī did not complete the proposed exegesis. In his introduction to the *Itqān*, al-Suyūṭī had presented the *Itqān* as an introduction to the proposed *tafsīr* in which he intended to capture the best of both

¹⁹² *Al-Itqān*, vols. 3-4, p. 467.

¹⁹³ *Al-Itqān*, vols. 3-4, p. 467ff.

¹⁹⁴ *Al-Itqān*, vols. 3-4, p. 484.

¹⁹⁵ *Al-Itqān*, vols. 3-4, p. 487.

streams of exegesis: *tafsīr bi-l-ma'thūr* and *tafsīr bi-l-ra'y*. In the final chapter of the *Itqān*, he noted that he had already begun the composition of the said work: *Majma' al-baḥrayn wa maṭla' al-badrayn* (The conjunction of the two seas and the horizon of the two moons).¹⁹⁶ But al-Suyūṭī confessed in his autobiography that he eventually abandoned this lofty project.¹⁹⁷

These data suggest that al-Suyūṭī initially intended the *Turjumān* to be no more than a *ḥadīth* collection that he would have used for composing *Majma' al-baḥrayn*. Moreover, the *Turjumān* would have served to establish al-Suyūṭī's mastery of tradition-based exegesis thus legitimizing his venture into opinion-based exegesis. But al-Suyūṭī eventually realised that he could not complete the grandiose task he set for himself. He then decided to expand the *Turjumān* into *al-Durr* and to champion *al-Durr* as his ultimate exegetical work. This explains why, in the *Itqān*, while he still had hopes of completing *Majma' al-baḥrayn*, he had referred to the *Turjumān* as merely a *musnad* book containing the exegeses of the prophet and his companions. Subsequently, al-Suyūṭī abandoned the idea of completing *Majma' al-baḥrayn*. He then expanded his tradition-based exegesis to make that his magnum opus in the field of *tafsīr*.

Dating the literary events will help to situate al-Suyūṭī's books in their chronological sequence. According to Nolin, al-Suyūṭī had completed the *Itqān* no later than the year 883.¹⁹⁸ As we have seen above, al-Suyūṭī composed his autobiography in the year 896/1490; and he composed *al-Durr* two years after that. In the following year,

¹⁹⁶ *Al-Itqān*, vols. 3-4, p. 502.

¹⁹⁷ Ḥaydar, p. 238.

¹⁹⁸ i.e. 1478 C.E., see Nolin, p. 16.

899/1493, al-Suyūṭī published his super-commentary on al-Bayḍāwī's *tafsīr*. But, this super-commentary, *Nawāhid al-abkār wa shawārid al-afkār*, has failed to eclipse *al-Durr*.¹⁹⁹

From al-Shurbajī's review of al-Suyūṭī's super-commentary, it is clear that it even failed to achieve dominance over some of the other super-commentaries that have been written on al-Bayḍāwī's exegesis.²⁰⁰ Some forty such works have been accomplished.²⁰¹ Some of these have advanced to become published editions.²⁰² At the time of writing his autobiography, al-Suyūṭī was still in the process of composing the said super-commentary. He listed his *ḥāshiyah* on al-Bayḍāwī's exegesis among those of his works the likes of which other scholars can compose and have composed.²⁰³ Al-Suyūṭī even gives us an idea of the size of the work. His super-commentary at the time extended to the end of the Qur'ān's sixth *sūrah*, and was contained in a medium-sized volume.²⁰⁴ In short, this was not to be a major literary achievement. Eager to register his achievement in the field of *tafsīr*, al-Suyūṭī found it expedient to direct his energies towards his tradition-based exegesis. He thus expanded the *Turjumān* to produce the gargantuan *al-Durr*.

¹⁹⁹ Al-Suyūṭī, *Nawāhid al-abkār wa shawārid al-afkār* manuscript in the National al-Asad Library, Damascus. See Al-Shurbajī, p. 292.

²⁰⁰ Al-Shurbajī, p. 292.

²⁰¹ Al-Shurbajī, p. 297.

²⁰² For example, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Khafājī, *Ḥāshiyat al-shihāb al-musammāh 'ināyat al-qāḍī wa-kifāyat al-rāḍī 'alā tafsīr al-Bayḍāwī* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 197-) 8 vols.

²⁰³ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Taḥadduth*, pp. 106-7.

²⁰⁴ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Taḥadduth*, p. 107.

2.5 Acknowledged Sources of *al-Durr*

The introduction we have studied above from the printed editions of *al-Durr* is supplemented by an appendage which Ḥaydar found in two manuscripts of the book: one located at the library of the grand mosque of San‘ā’; and another at the Maḥmūdiyyah library in Medina.²⁰⁵ Ḥaydar censures the editors of every printed edition of the book for omitting this valuable supplementary introduction to its contents. But he expresses particular discontent with al-Turkī since the Maḥmūdiyyah manuscript, praised by al-Turkī as the most complete and most dependable, does contain the extended prologue.²⁰⁶ Yet, to Ḥaydar’s dismay, al-Turkī and others do not so much as attempt a justification for their exclusion of this valuable adjunct.²⁰⁷ These editors may have judged the authenticity of the addendum negatively, hence relegating it to oblivion. In the absence of their explicit judgment, however, there remains little reason to not include the extension here as a guide to al-Suyūṭī’s thinking about his *tafsīr*.

Moreover, the augmentation seems compatible with what is known about the exegete’s procedure in composing some of his other works, and with what can be discerned of his method in composing the *tafsīr* itself. As Ḥaydar has noted, it is not uncommon for al-Suyūṭī to provide, in the introduction to his writings, a list of scholars whose writings will serve as his sources. Al-Suyūṭī begins the supplement by writing the *basmalah* and other expressions invoking the help of God.²⁰⁸ Al-Suyūṭī then lists, in

²⁰⁵ Ḥaydar, *Muqaddimah*, p. 250.

²⁰⁶ Al-Turkī’s Introduction to *al-Durr*, p. 64.

²⁰⁷ Ḥaydar, *Muqaddimah*, p. 245.

²⁰⁸ The *basmalah* refers to the expression *bi-smi-llāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm* (in the Name of God the Beneficent, the Merciful).

chronological order, the names of one hundred and one scholars from whose works he extracted the contents of his exegesis. The dates of death given in this document for each of these scholars turn out to be accurate with only few and minor variations from what we know today. That al-Suyūṭī had such information at hand explains an observation made by al-Shurbajī. Al-Shurbajī discerned that al-Suyūṭī mostly cites his numerous written sources for a single tradition in roughly chronological order according to the dates of the deaths of their authors. In this way, in his exegesis of Qurʾān 2:187, al-Suyūṭī credits a tradition to the following scholars in the correct chronological order: Mālik (d. 179/795), al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/819), Ibn Abī Shaybah (d. 235/849), al-Bukhārī (d. 256/869), Muslim (d. 261/874), and al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892).²⁰⁹

Despite its length, however, al-Suyūṭī's checklist of sources is obviously incomplete. One does not read far into *al-Durr* to find scholars cited there who do not appear in the roster. Al-Thaʿlabī (d. 427/1035) and al-Wāhidī (d. 486/1076) are named, in reverse chronological order, as the sources for the fourth tradition cited in *al-Durr*.²¹⁰ But neither of these two exegetes is enumerated in the master list of sources given in the introduction. Moreover, a recent study has shown that al-Suyūṭī used more than four hundred sources in composing *al-Durr*.²¹¹ Al-Shurbajī has noted that the scholars cited by al-Suyūṭī are as early as Juwaybir b. Saʿīd al-Azadī (d.140/707) and as late as Ibn

²⁰⁹ Al-Shurbajī, p. 256.

²¹⁰ *Al-Durr*, vol. 1, p. 6.

²¹¹ ʿĀmir Ḥusayn Ṣabrī, *Masādir Jalāl al-Suyūṭī fī kitābih al-durr al-manthur fī-l-tafsīr bi-l-ma'thur* in the Journal of the College of Literature, University Press of the Emirates, no. 4 (1408) pp. 185-334, as cited in Muhammad Yusuf al-Shurbajī, *al-Imām al-Suyūṭī wa Juhūduh fī 'ulūm al-Qurʾān* (Damascus: Dār al-Maktabi, 1421/2000) p. 271.

Ḥajar (d. 752/1448).²¹² But the register supplied by al-Suyūṭī begins with Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795) and ends with Ibn ‘Asākir (d. 571/1175).²¹³

To explain the dissonance between al-Suyūṭī’s introduction and the contents of *al-Durr*, Ḥaydar refers to al-Suyūṭī’s similar strategy in two of his other tomes: the *Itqān* and *al-Jāmi’ al-kabīr*. In each case, al-Suyūṭī lists in his introduction the works he will draw upon; yet he proceeds to cite additional sources within his compendium. Ḥaydar credits this discrepancy to a change in al-Suyūṭī’s intention over time. According to Ḥaydar’s hypothesis, al-Suyūṭī once intended only to use the works listed in his introduction, but later decided to add others while neglecting to update his introduction.²¹⁴

A simpler solution, however, is more plausible: that al-Suyūṭī did not intend his list of sources to be comprehensive. Rather, in keeping with his swift pace of composition, a factor that explains his voluminous literary output, he simply listed the first one hundred and one scholars the dates of whose deaths were easily accessible. This explains why al-Tha‘labī and his student al-Wāḥidī, both important exegetes, failed to appear in the list. Within his exegesis, al-Suyūṭī’s reference to al-Tha‘labī and al-Wāḥidī in reverse chronological order indicates that al-Suyūṭī did not have the dates of their deaths ready at hand. Moreover, had he merely recalled at the time of his writing that al-Wāḥidī was a student of al-Tha‘labī, he may have referred to them in the correct chronological sequence. For, such was his normal procedure.

²¹² Al-Shurbajī, p. 271.

²¹³ Ḥaydar, *Muqaddimah*, pp. 247-248.

²¹⁴ Ḥaydar, *Muqaddimah*, pp. 249.

One detects a sense of satisfaction in al-Suyūṭī's statement at the end of the list: "The number of men mentioned here is one hundred and one."²¹⁵ Thus it is clear that, although the list is not numbered, the author did not lose count. From the outset he may have had no doubt that he could far exceed that number, especially if he composed the list some time after he had already begun working on the exegesis. Once his aim was achieved, al-Suyūṭī felt no need to prolong his introduction by listing further sources. This latter suggestion serves to explain why the list of authorities suddenly stops with Ibn 'Asākir who died three centuries before *al-Durr* was composed, though sources as late as Ibn Ḥajar were used in the composition. To be sure, listing some of the comprehensive near-contemporary works, such as those of Ibn Ḥajar, would have served to minimize al-Suyūṭī's achievement. However, al-Suyūṭī repeatedly cited Ibn Ḥajar in *al-Durr* and other compositions. Therefore, if al-Suyūṭī intended to compile a comprehensive list of his sources, it is difficult to see why he would omit Ibn Ḥajar. In sum, al-Suyūṭī ended his list of sources once he was satisfied that he had already listed a sufficient number of sources to demonstrate his familiarity with the available literature.

2.6 Emphasis on Four Sources

Further clues about al-Suyūṭī's intent and about some of his most important sources can be deciphered from his epilogue to *al-Durr*. As mentioned above, al-Suyūṭī capped his exegesis with a lengthy excerpt from the introduction to Ibn Ḥajar's book on the occasions of Qur'ānic revelation: *al- 'Ujāb fī bayān al-asbāb* (The wonder of

²¹⁵ Ḥaydar, *Muqaddimah*, p. 286.

wonders: on the clarification of the circumstances).²¹⁶ Al-Suyūṭī does not say why he chose to cite this selection at the end of his exegesis. And, while copying that document, al-Suyūṭī does not pause to add a comment that would make explicit the significance of the intrusion. After the citation, he draws no conclusions, as if the import of the excerpt is self-evident. Though the citation is given in the words of Ibn Ḥajar, however, there is no reason to not take it as being just as reflective of al-Suyūṭī's own position. Moreover, the passage's placement at the end of al-Suyūṭī's exegesis suggests that it reflects some of al-Suyūṭī's final thoughts on the nature of his work.

The greater part of the citation traces some significant lines of transmission of traditional *tafsīr* leading from first-century authorities to second-century compilations. However, what is of immediate interest here is not the entire history of early *tafsīr* but the relationship between *al-Durr* and the four major works of *tafsīr* mentioned in the first paragraph of that citation. The four exegeses are those of ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd b. Nasr al-Kashshī (d. 249/863); Abu Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923); Abu Bakr Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. al-Mundhir al-Naysābūrī (d. 318/930); and Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Rahmān b. Abī Ḥātim Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Rāzī (d. 327/938).²¹⁷ Al-Suyūṭī grants that ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd deserves the honour of having lived much earlier than the others. Whereas the others were from the same generation as that of the famous six *ḥadīth* compilers, ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd was from the generation of the teachers of the six.

²¹⁶ Ibn Ḥajar, *al-'Ujāb fī bayān al-asbāb* ed. Fawwāz Aḥmad Zamarlī (Beirut: Dar ibn Ḥazm, 2002) pp. 51-63. Al-Suyūṭī's extract is from pp. 57-63.

²¹⁷ Mukhlif Banīh al-'Urf, *Qiṭ'ah min tafsīr al-imām 'Abd ibn Ḥumayd* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2004) 137 pp.; Abī Bakr Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. al-Mundhir al-Naysābūrī, *Kitāb tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, ed. Saʿd b. Muḥammad al-Saʿd (Medina: Dār al-Ma'āthir, 2002) 2 vols.; Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī*, ed. Aḥmad Fathī ʿAbd al-Rahmān Ḥijāzī (Beirut: Dar Al-Kotob al-'Ilmiyah, 2006) 7 vols.

However, in al-Suyūṭī's view the best of these four exegeses is not the earliest but the one which combines the two streams of exegesis: reason and tradition.²¹⁸ Al-Suyūṭī awards this special recognition to al-Ṭabarī because, as distinct from the other three exegetes, al-Ṭabarī did not merely present the traditional exegetical agglomeration. Rather, al-Ṭabarī added discussions of various Qur'ānic readings; he analysed the grammar; and he evaluated the proposed meanings of most Qur'ānic verses. Al-Suyūṭī appreciates the efforts which al-Ṭabarī applied in the service of demonstrating his preferences among the diverse reported interpretations of various Qur'ānic verses. Al-Suyūṭī further praises al-Ṭabarī for being outstanding among other exegetes, even beyond the other mentioned trio. According to al-Suyūṭī, al-Ṭabarī has singularly mastered the various areas of required expertise whereas other scholars may be masters of only some areas. Thus in al-Suyūṭī's view the other three exegetes, and other exegetes more generally, tend to be outstanding in some areas but weak in others.²¹⁹

Clearly, al-Suyūṭī cannot intend to present *al-Durr* as the ideal *tafsīr*. That prestigious position he has already reserved for the *tafsīr* of al-Ṭabarī. In this way, al-Suyūṭī, a *salafī*, generally proud before his contemporaries, remains humble before his predecessors. It is also clear that *al-Durr* is not even of the type of *tafsīr* that evaluates and pronounces judgement on the varieties of exegetical opinions on a question. But it is equally clear that al-Suyūṭī intends to position his exegesis as being of great worth, especially in relation to the works of al-Ṭabarī and the other three named exegetes. The uniqueness of *al-Durr*, in its author's mind must lie in its superior contribution to the

²¹⁸ *Al-Durr*, vol. 15, p. 820.

²¹⁹ *Al-Durr*, vol. 15, p. 820.

tradition-based aspect of al-Ṭabarī's work. The other three works were exclusively focused on tradition-based exegesis.

Al-Suyūṭī's pride in his own contribution would have had to be based on a unique feature of *al-Durr*. A unique feature of *al-Durr* is its exaggerated adherence to the traditional form. While presenting the exegetical traditions, al-Suyūṭī generally does not overtly signal to his readers what opinion the traditions are intended to support. In this way, he lets his readers decide what significance the traditions hold for the exegetical task at hand. By way of contrast, I will now show that while Ibn Abī Ḥātim maintains a close adherence to this traditional ideal, he usually indicates that the traditions he presents support a variety of views. After mentioning the Qur'ānic segment to be elucidated, Ibn Abī Ḥātim typically presents a tradition or two, and then writes the caption "the second view (*al-wajh al-thānī*).” He would then present traditions under that caption. He likewise introduces captions to mark a third or fourth view with the supporting traditions thus appropriately categorized.²²⁰ Sometimes Ibn Abī Ḥātim gives a short description of the various views, thus further guiding his readers on how to think about the meaning and import of both the verse at hand and the traditions presented.²²¹ *Al-Durr* is thus unique. For, al-Suyūṭī generally maintains silence about the variety of opinions on a question, and he refuses to announce which meanings the traditions are intended to support.

As for the number of traditions, we have already seen that *al-Durr* does not contain more traditions than does al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr*.²²² However, in the subsequent

²²⁰ See, for example, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, vol. 1, p. 18.

²²¹ See, for example, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, vol. 1, pp. 24-25.

²²² See above, p. 56, note 183.

chapters of the present study, we will see that the situation is different when we consider the exegeses of specific Qur'ānic lemmata where al-Suyūṭī has a distinctive point to make. He has included, at choice locations in *al-Durr*, more traditions than are found at the comparable locations in the other four *tafsīrs*. Al-Suyūṭī has not only gone beyond the four works to source out more traditions, but he has also gathered from remote sources some most unusual and interesting traditions. This is another reason for al-Suyūṭī's pride in his work.

According to al-Suyūṭī, in the words he has borrowed from Ibn Ḥajar, seldom do the reported exegeses of the prophet, his companions, and their successors elude these four expert exegetes. Therefore it is fair to expect that al-Suyūṭī would attempt to augment the exegetical traditions contained in these four works with other traditions he deems relevant. Indeed, the four mentioned works are the sources most often acknowledged in *al-Durr*. Ibn Abī Ḥātim is cited 10,940 times; al-Ṭabarī 10,590 times; Ibn al-Mundhir 8,657 times; and 'Abd b. Ḥumayd 7,644 times.²²³ Of these four exegetical models, only al-Ṭabarī's work survives in its completeness. Hence *al-Durr* has become an important source for reconstructing the other three works.

The next most often cited exegesis is that of Ibn Mardawayh (d. 410/1019). Al-Suyūṭī cited that work 4,515 times. Ibn Mardawayh's *tafsīr*, referred to by Ibn Ḥajar as *al-Tafsir al-musnad*, is now lost.²²⁴ Hence *al-Durr* has become an important source for

²²³ Based on my search of *al-Durr* in *al-Marji'* DVD, 2nd edition.

²²⁴ As noted by Ḥaydar, p. 279.

reconstituting that work as well.²²⁵ *Al-Durr*'s chief contribution to the exegetical stream will be found in the unique traditions it adds to that stream, especially those gathered from Ibn Mardawayh's *tafsīr* and other lost early works.

As for 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan'ānī (d. 211/826) whose exegesis is an early representation of tradition-based *tafsīr*, al-Suyūṭī acknowledged using both his exegesis and his *ḥadīth* collection.²²⁶ Al-Suyūṭī cited him 2,276 times. But it is not immediately clear how many of those citations were from each of 'Abd al-Razzāq's two works. When al-Suyūṭī specifies the work of 'Abd al-Razzāq he is citing, it is invariably the *ḥadīth* collection. He never identifies his citations as being from the *tafsīr*, though many of his citations can be quickly traced to that work. That the two texts of this author, an exegesis and a *ḥadīth* corpus are drained into *al-Durr* is commensurate with the nature of *al-Durr* as a *ḥadīth*-based *tafsīr*.

In addition to *tafsīr* works, therefore, *ḥadīth* collections represent another category of works whose flow into *al-Durr* is to be expected, and whose use was acknowledged by al-Suyūṭī. The *ḥadīth* collector most often cited is al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066). He was cited 4,693 times. Al-Bayhaqī's *al-Sunan al-kubrā* (The greater collection of *sunnahs*) was a copious source of *ḥadīths* containing some twenty thousand

²²⁵ Such a reconstruction has been the subject of five recent dissertations at the Islamic University Press of Medina, each reproducing approximately 20% of the entire exegesis. The first of these theses is Sharīf 'Alī Muḥammad, *Marwiyyāt Ibn Mardawayh fī-l-tafsīr min awwali sūrat al-fātiḥah ilā ākhir sūrat al-mā'idah: jam'an wa dirāsatan ma'a dirāsāt Ibn Mardawayh wa manhajih fī-l-tafsīr* (The Traditions of Ibn Mardawayh on Exegesis From *Sūrat al-Fātiḥah* to the End of *Sūrah al-Mā'idah*: A Compilation and Study Together With a Study of Ibn Mardawayh and his Hermeneutics).

²²⁶ 'Abd al-Razzāq b. Hammām al-Ṣan'ānī, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muṣṭafā Muslim Muḥammad (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd, 1989) 3 vols.; Abī Bakr 'Abd al-Razzāq b. Hammām b. Nāfi' al-Ṣan'ānī, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, ed. Ayman Naṣr al-Dīn al-Azharī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīyah, 2000) 12 vols.

narratives supporting every detail of Shafi‘ī law.²²⁷ Al-Suyūṭī was familiar with thirteen of al-Bayhaqī’s works.²²⁸ In addition to the *Sunan*, al-Suyūṭī also often cited al-Bayhaqī’s *Shu‘ab al-īmān* (Branches of the faith) and his *Dalā‘il al-nubuwwah* (Proofs of the prophethood). But such heavy reliance on a fifth-century *ḥadīth* collection instead of the canonical collections from two centuries earlier shows that al-Suyūṭī was more interested in the quantity of traditions than in their quality. His penchant for gathering traditions of dubious authenticity is evident in his citations from *Dalā‘il al-nubuwwah*. Works of this genre were relatively unconcerned with the authenticity of their contents.²²⁹

The next most often cited *ḥadīth* collector in *al-Durr* is Ibn Abī Shaybah (d. 235/849). He was cited 3,668 times. His *Muṣannaf*, a collection of traditions topically arranged, is interesting if for no other reason than its predating of the canonical collections.²³⁰ But it also contains some unique traditions which al-Suyūṭī has incorporated into *al-Durr*. Likewise, al-Suyūṭī frequently cites Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855).²³¹ Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal’s collection of nearly thirty-thousand traditions dwarfs the canonical works.²³² Yet the canonical works, coming a generation later, were smaller mainly because they were content to include only the traditions that met comparatively

²²⁷ Brown, *Ḥadīth*, p. 158.

²²⁸ Al-Suyūṭī, *Muqaddimat tafsīr al-durr al-manthūr li-l-Suyūṭī*, ed. Ḥaydar, pp. 281-82.

²²⁹ Brown, *Ḥadīth*, p. 37.

²³⁰ Abū Bakr ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Abī Shaybah, *al-Muṣannaf*, ed. Ḥamad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Jum‘ah, Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Laḥīdān (Riyādh: Maktabat al-Rushd Nāshirūn, 2004) 16 vols.

²³¹ 2,427 times.

²³² Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad al-Imam Aḥmad*, ed. Shuayb al-Arnaut *et al* (Beirut: al-Risālah, 1999) 52 vols.

higher standards of authenticity. The pre-canonical collections of both Ibn Abī Shaybah and Ibn Ḥanbal, while being interesting for the era they represent, were less concerned than were the canonical works with the authenticity of their traditions. Al-Suyūṭī's reliance on these works shows that he was willing to accept traditions of lesser authenticity. In comparison with his thousands of citations from each of these two pre-canonical works, al-Suyūṭī cited the canonical al-Tirmidhī 1,473 times, this being his largest number of citations from a single canonical *ḥadīth* collection. The next most cited canonical collection is that of al-Bukhārī, cited on 1,268 occasions.

2.7 Unacknowledged Sources of *al-Durr*

As in the introduction to *al-Durr*, so too in several of his works al-Suyūṭī has stressed the importance of attributing material to the sources from which they were derived.²³³ Thus al-Suyūṭī has left the impression with reviewers of his works that he derives his materials directly from his stated sources. We have already seen above that a staggering number of four hundred sources have been cited in *al-Durr*. Such information has left al-Shurbajī marvelling at the diligence of al-Suyūṭī in consulting that many sources. Al-Shurbajī adds further reasons for such amazement. First, he points out that al-Suyūṭī, in his exegesis of just one verse, Qur'ān 2:238, has presented two hundred and seventy-five traditions.²³⁴ Second, al-Shurbajī notes that in the exegesis of Qur'ān 3:135 al-Suyūṭī cited a tradition from as many as fifteen sources. Some of that wonder, however, is abated when we consider the resources available to al-Suyūṭī. Al-Suyūṭī lived

²³³ For a survey of his various statements about this, culled from several of his works, see Ḥaydar, pp. 246-47.

²³⁴ Al-Shurbajī, p. 255.

at a time when the cumulative *tafsīr* tradition had reached its pinnacle. Massive *ḥadīth* collections had been combined into super-collections. Moreover, commentaries had been written on the individual works cross-referencing their traditions to alternative collections. Having such comprehensive secondary works before him in both the fields of *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth*, al-Suyūṭī was saved the trouble of having to consult every one of the original multiple texts he cited.

I will now show that the *tafsīr* of Ibn Kathīr was a prime location from which al-Suyūṭī harnessed exegetical traditions sourced to the canonical *ḥadīth* books.²³⁵ Al-Suyūṭī does refer to the canonical books. So too does Ibn Kathīr. But not so the exegeses which, as seen above, al-Suyūṭī presented as model *tafsīrs*. While the four model exegeses were being written in the third and fourth centuries, the *ḥadīth* collections were not yet widely accepted as authoritative sources. The *ḥadīth* collections of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, the two now recognised as the *ṣaḥīḥayn* (the two authentic) collections, did not achieve canonical status until the dawn of the fifth/eleventh century. This fact is amply demonstrated by Jonathan Brown in his *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim: The Formation and Function of the Sunnī Ḥadīth Canon*.²³⁶ These two exceptional collections broke the conservative resistance to the canonization of *ḥadīth* works. Thus the way was opened for other *ḥadīth* works to be canonized, and for the canon of six books, the *ṣiḥāḥ sittah*, to be recognised.²³⁷ When al-Suyūṭī wanted to look for a canonical *ḥadīth* he could search through the six books or he could simply copy it from

²³⁵ Ibn Kathīr al-Dimashqī, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1998) 8 vols.

²³⁶ Jonathan Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim: The Formation and Function of the Sunnī Ḥadīth Canon* (Leiden: Brill, 2007) pp. 367-68.

²³⁷ Brown, *Canonization*, p. 337.

Ibn Kathīr's *tafsīr* trusting that the *ḥadīths* therein are correctly attributed to the specified works. Ibn Kathīr was likewise an efficient guide to the post-canonical collections as sources for exegetical *ḥadīths*.

That al-Suyūṭī made use of Ibn Kathīr's exegesis is clear from occasional references to Ibn Kathīr in *al-Durr*. To be sure, no *ḥadīth* in *al-Durr* is credited to Ibn Kathīr. But Ibn Kathīr has been cited for his expertise on the reliability of some traditions presented in *al-Durr* with reference to Qur'ān 2:102, 223, 255; and 18:60-82. Al-Suyūṭī does not say from which of Ibn Kathīr's works the cited opinions are derived. But the comparable locations in Ibn Kathīr's exegesis do contain the expressed opinions to which al-Suyūṭī refers. Hence there can be no doubt that, while he was composing *al-Durr*, al-Suyūṭī had before him a copy of Ibn Kathīr's exegesis.

That Ibn Kathīr's *tafsīr* in some way influenced *al-Durr* is especially significant in contrast with an assertion made by Ismā'īl Sālim 'Abd al-'Āl in his monograph: *Ibn Kathīr wa manhajuhu fī-l-tafsīr* (Ibn Kathīr and his exegetical methodology). 'Abd al-'Āl asserted that Ibn Kathīr's exegesis did not influence any of the subsequent pre-modern exegetical works.²³⁸ 'Abd al-'Āl suggested that the reason for this obliviousness to Ibn Kathīr's *tafsīr* is that the subsequent works, in contradistinction to that of Ibn Kathīr, were not of the tradition-based genre. But, having said that, 'Abd al-'Āl anticipated a question that would obviously arise: What of *al-Durr al-manthūr*—for that is of the *ma'thūr* genre? 'Abd al-'Āl's answer to this question was equally emphatic:

We answer again in the negative. For, this exegesis of al-Suyūṭī is such that its composer gathered in it the opinions of the ancient exegetes. And perhaps he

²³⁸ Ismā'īl Sālim 'Abd al-'Āl, *Ibn Kathīr wa manhajuhu fī-l-tafsīr* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Malik Faiṣal al-Islāmiyya, 1984) p. 451.

considered the exegesis of Ibn Kathīr a modern exegesis from his perspective, since Ibn Kathīr died in 774H while it is known that al-Suyūṭī died in the year 911H.²³⁹

However, ‘Abd al-‘Āl is incorrect. Al-Suyūṭī not only referred to Ibn Kathīr for his judgment on *ḥadīths* but also as a ready source from which to obtain exegetical traditions. In fact, al-Suyūṭī had been familiar with, and already used, Ibn Kathīr's *tafsīr* in the composition of his *Itqān*. In that work, composed more than a decade before *al-Durr*, al-Suyūṭī appealed to Ibn Kathīr on numerous occasions. Al-Suyūṭī explicitly referred to Ibn Kathīr's exegesis twice in the *Itqān*.²⁴⁰ Even if al-Suyūṭī wanted to find the exegetical traditions in early written works, Ibn Kathīr's exegesis, open before him, would have directed al-Suyūṭī to the written sources of such traditions. To search the *ḥadīth* collections, it is helpful to know what one is looking for, and in which of the several massive collections it is located.

Since al-Suyūṭī was working on his exegesis one Qur'ānic verse at a time, he would have found it convenient to refer to another running commentary where the relevant traditions are to be found in reference to the same verse. In a *ḥadīth* work, on the other hand, such traditions are seldom found in such a convenient sequence, except in works that have a section on *tafsīr*. But such sections, where they exist, do not treat of all Qur'ānic verses. Nor do they tend to contain the cumulative stock of *ḥadīths* that would be desired by an exegete such al-Suyūṭī who aimed to produce an encyclopaedic exegesis. Using other exegetical works as a guide to the traditions was an efficient method that al-Suyūṭī would have been foolhardy to avoid. And Ibn Kathīr's *tafsīr* in

²³⁹ ‘Abd al-‘Āl, pp. 401-402.

²⁴⁰ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, chapter 72, p. 15; and chapter 80, p. 191 in *al-Marjī* DVD

particular tended to specify the canonical and post-canonical works from which its *ḥadīths* were obtained.

As for commentaries on the *ḥadīth* collections, these serve as convenient sources not only for understanding a tradition, but also for discovering the numerous variations of a tradition and for locating other traditions on the same subject. We have seen that al-Suyūṭī culled an excerpt for his epilogue from a work of Ibn Ḥajar. But it is also clear that, in the body of *al-Durr*, al-Suyūṭī made unacknowledged use of another significant work of Ibn Ḥajar: *Faṭḥ al-bārī*.²⁴¹ That work is a commentary (*sharḥ*) on al-Bukhārī's *ḥadīth* collection. Al-Suyūṭī was deeply familiar with that *ḥadīth* commentary. His own *al-Tawshīḥ*, likewise a commentary on al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ*, is a blatant reduction of the work of Ibn Ḥajar.²⁴²

There are three occasions when al-Suyūṭī made explicit reference to Ibn Ḥajar within the body of *al-Durr*. One is a reference to Ibn Ḥajar's index to *ḥadīths*. I will discuss this work below. As for the other two references, al-Suyūṭī does not specify the written source of the citations, but they are traceable to Ibn Ḥajar's *ḥadīth* commentary.²⁴³ Al-Suyūṭī's reference to Ibn Ḥajar on the first of these two occasions is only to appeal to his judgement on a *ḥadīth's* authenticity, but not for the *ḥadīth* itself. On the second occasion, reference is to Ibn Ḥajar's view that the exegesis of a verse reported in a given *ḥadīth* is based on an unusual reading of the verse.

²⁴¹ Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī. *Faṭḥ al-bārī bi sharḥ ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Cairo: Dar al-Ḥadīth, 1998).

²⁴² Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Tawshīḥ sharḥ jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ: sharḥ ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd, 1998).

²⁴³ *Al-Durr*, vol. 1, p. 634; and vol. 8, p. 506 in *al-Marjīʿ*; cf. *Faṭḥ*, vol. 8, p. 236; and p. 863.

There is no reason why al-Suyūṭī, having consulted that commentary, would have made such limited use of it as is reflected in the mere two citations. In Ibn Ḥajar's commentary al-Suyūṭī found discussions on *ḥadīths* tracing their varied versions to numerous early works. Even if al-Suyūṭī wanted to find the said traditions in the original works, knowing where to look is half the task accomplished. Although traditions having a bearing on exegesis can be found scattered throughout al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ*, and therefore also in Ibn Ḥajar's *Fath*, al-Bukhārī includes a chapter dedicated to exegesis. In his exposition of that chapter, Ibn Ḥajar cites alternative versions of the *ḥadīths* therein. Moreover, Ibn Ḥajar indicates the various early collections where the alternative versions of those *ḥadīths* are located.

Super-collections of *ḥadīth* represented another type of comprehensive source that render redundant the consultation of individual *ḥadīth* works. When al-Suyūṭī's goal was to refer to multiple works in which a *ḥadīth* is located, he turned not to the individual works but to the super-collections. For a useful introduction to the super-collections of *ḥadīth* that were available to al-Suyūṭī, we turn now to Jonathan Brown's *Ḥadīth: Muḥammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*.²⁴⁴ There are three categories of *ḥadīth* works that are most relevant to our discussion: what Brown calls digest collections, supplemental collections, and indices.²⁴⁵ Digest collections combined and consolidated the contents of the canonical collections into a more manageable form. For example, Ibn Razīn (d. 524/1129) combined the traditions of al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Abū

²⁴⁴ Jonathan Brown, *Ḥadīth: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (New York: Oneworld, 2009).

²⁴⁵ Brown, *Ḥadīth*, pp. 57-60.

Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasā'ī and Mālik.²⁴⁶ A similar work was composed by Ibn al-Athīr (d. 606/1210).²⁴⁷ Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201) in his *Jāmi' al-masānīd* combined the traditions of al-Bukhārī, Muslim, al-Tirmidhī, and Ibn Ḥanbal.

Supplemental collections (*kutub al-zawā'id*) add traditions to the approximately twenty thousand contained in the canonical collections, thus bringing a larger supply of *ḥadīths* within easy reach.²⁴⁸ Brown writes:

With these supplemental collections at their disposal, Muslim scholars could easily reference *ḥadīths* outside the canonical collections as well as the rulings of major late *ḥadīth* masters on their *isnāds*.²⁴⁹

A notable supplemental collection is *Majma' al-zawā'id*, composed by the Cairene scholar Nūr al-Dīn al-Haythamī (d. 807/1405).²⁵⁰ That work was used by al-Suyūfī without acknowledgement. That work lists all the *ḥadīths* which, though not found in the *siḥāh sittah*, are nevertheless found in one of the following works: the *Musnads* of Ibn Ḥanbal, Abu Ya'lā al-Mawṣilī and al-Bazzār; and the *Mu'jams* of al-Tabarānī.

Another notable supplemental collection which was available to al-Suyūfī is *Ithāf al-khiyarah al-maharah bi-zawā'id al-masānīd al-'asharah* compiled by Ahmad al-

²⁴⁶ Brown, *Ḥadīth*, p. 57. The compiler has included Mālik but excluded Ibn Mājah. This is obviously how he perceived the canon to be composed. Ibn Mājah's *Sunan* as sixth in the canon was late to be settled. Its present position was variously occupied by Mālik's *Muwaṭṭa'*, as is here the case, and, alternatively, by Ibn Ḥanbal's *Musnad*.

²⁴⁷ Ibn al-Athīr, *Jāmi' al-uṣūl fī aḥādīth al-rasūl*, ed. Ayman Ṣāliḥ Sha'bān (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīyah, 1998) 15 vols.

²⁴⁸ Brown, *Ḥadīth*, p. 58.

²⁴⁹ Brown, *Ḥadīth*, pp. 58-59.

²⁵⁰ 'Ali b. Abī Bakr al-Haythamī, *Bughyat al-rā'id fī taḥqīq majma' al-zawā'id wa manba' al-fawā'id*, ed. 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-Darwīsh (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr. 1991-92) 10 vols.

Būṣīrī (d. 840/1436).²⁵¹ This work combines the narratives of ten separate collections of *ḥadīth*. But al-Būṣīrī had also produced a summary of the same work, one shorn of the *isnāds*: *Mukhtaṣar ithāf al-sādah al-maharah bi-zawā'id al-masānīd al-'asharah*.²⁵² It is this latter of al-Būṣīrī's two above mentioned works of which I see traces in *al-Durr*. According to al-Sakhāwī, another work of al-Būṣīrī was prepared for publication by his son Muḥammad b. Ahmad b. Abu Bakr b. Ismā'īl al-Būṣīrī after the father's death.²⁵³ It is significant that al-Suyūṭī, in his autobiography, lists the younger al-Būṣīrī among his teachers.²⁵⁴ Hence it is likely that al-Suyūṭī had access to some of the senior al-Būṣīrī's books.

Some verbal similarities between al-Būṣīrī's introduction to his summary work, *Mukhtaṣar ithāf al-sādah*, and al-Suyūṭī's introduction to *al-Durr* suggest that al-Suyūṭī based his introduction on that of al-Būṣīrī. Al-Būṣīrī explained in the introduction to his derivative work why he decided to reduce his master work. He had at first combined, from the ten collections he listed, all the traditions which were not already in the six canonical works. Thus al-Būṣīrī writes:

The result, by God's grace and assistance, was a complete, copious, book—a leader. But studying it proved too much for those who were short on zeal. The length and breadth of the work deterred them from it. So, one of my brothers

²⁵¹ For a biography of al-Būṣīrī see Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī, *Al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi' li ahl al-qarn al-tāsi'*, no editor (Beirut: Dār maktabat al-ḥayāt) 10 vols., vol. 1, p. 251.

²⁵² Ahmad b. Abi Bakr b. Ismā'īl al-Būṣīrī, *Mukhtaṣar ithāf al-sādah al-mahara bi-zawā'id al-masānīd al-'asharah*, ed. Sayyid Kasrawi Ḥasan (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiya, 1996) 10 vols.

²⁵³ For a biography of the junior al-Būṣīrī, see al-Sakhāwī, vol. 6, p. 296.

²⁵⁴ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Taḥadduth*, pp. 59-60. Al-Suyūṭī gives the date of the son's birth as 815H. As Sartain notes, however, neither al-Suyūṭī nor al-Sakhāwī has furnished the date of the said scholar's demise.

having a high level of zeal asked me to remove the *isnāds* leaving the bare texts of the traditions so that the servants of God would benefit from it more generally.²⁵⁵

Thus was born the summary version. Al-Būṣīrī's work has survived in both forms. Both the longer and shorter versions are now available in print. The survival of the *isnād*-laden version proves the value of such a work, if not for laity then for scholarship. The continued presence of the longer version serves to justify our scepticism about the existence of the *Turjumān* as a finished work. As was argued above, had the *Turjumān* reached its publishable stage we would expect it to have similarly survived.

In sum, it is clear that, long before al-Suyūṭī, al-Būṣīrī had already learnt from experience that a book of *ḥadīths* replete with *isnāds* would be of little interest to lay readers. Al-Suyūṭī gained a similar first-hand experience with the failure of his *Turjumān* to generate enough interest. But his explanation of that phenomenon in his introduction to *al-Durr* is now shown to be unoriginal. We have already seen the main section of al-Suyūṭī's introduction to *al-Durr* above. The two introductions, those of al-Būṣīrī and al-Suyūṭī share a similar structure and main ideas. Moreover, the extent of shared vocabulary between the two introductions is striking. Al-Būṣīrī wrote: *Lākin ṭāla 'alā al-himam al-qāṣirah taḥṣīluh* (but studying it was too lengthy for those who are short on zeal).²⁵⁶ Similarly, al-Suyūṭī wrote: *Ra'aytu qusūr akthar al-himam 'an taḥṣīlih* (I saw a shortage of much zeal for studying the work).²⁵⁷ Al-Suyūṭī used more than just the

²⁵⁵ Al-Būṣīrī, *Mukhtaṣar*, p. 39.

²⁵⁶ Al-Būṣīrī, *Mukhtaṣar*, p. 39.

²⁵⁷ *Al-Durr*, Introduction, p. 4.

introduction to al-Būṣīrī's work. He found it a convenient collection of traditions topically arranged; and its section on exegesis was a ready source of exegetical *ḥadīths*.

Finally, among supplemental collections is a work of Ibn Ḥajar: *al-Maṭālib al-‘āliyah bi-zawā'id al-masānīd al-thamāniyah*.²⁵⁸ In this work Ibn Ḥajar brought together the traditions of eight major corpuses and placed them within easy reach. Al-Suyūṭī cites some of those works. But Ibn Ḥajar's supplemental collection spared al-Suyūṭī the effort of consulting those other works directly.

As for indices of *ḥadīth*, referred to as *aṭrāf* works, these are encyclopaedic references to *ḥadīths* arranged alphabetically according to the first word in a memorable segment of the *ḥadīth*, usually the opening words of the narrative.²⁵⁹ The historian Ibn ‘Asākir composed such a work indexing the traditions of five of the six-book canon. We have already noted above that al-Suyūṭī in his extended introduction ended his list of sources with the mention of Ibn ‘Asākir.²⁶⁰ Al-Suyūṭī credits this scholar with the authorship of “*al-Tārīkh* [The history] and other works.” Ḥaydar adds that the other works include Ibn ‘Asākir's *al-Mu'jam* (The dictionary).²⁶¹ Ḥaydar's reference is to *Mu'jam al-shuyūkh*, a three volume biographical dictionary detailing the lives of Ibn ‘Asākir's teachers.²⁶² Given al-Suyūṭī's familiarity with these works of Ibn ‘Asākir, it is

²⁵⁸ Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *al-Maṭālib al-‘āliyah bi-zawā'id al-masānīd al-thamāniyah*, ed. ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abd al-Muḥsin b. Aḥmad al-Tuwayjirī (Riyadh: Dār al-Ghayth, 1998-2000) 19 vols.

²⁵⁹ *Ṭaraf* literally means ‘end’, and refers to a key statement in the *ḥadīth*, usually at its beginning, by which the *ḥadīth* is easily identifiable among scholars.

²⁶⁰ Ḥaydar, p. 286.

²⁶¹ Ḥaydar, p. 286.

²⁶² Josef W. Meri and Jere L. Bacharach, *Medieval Muslim Civilization* (New York: Routledge, 2006) vol. 1, p. 351.

not implausible that al-Suyūṭī was also familiar with, and used, Ibn ‘Asākir’s *aṭrāf* work as well. As Brown noted, the said work was widely copied.²⁶³

Al-Mizzī (d. 742/1341) composed another significant work of the same genre, one whose influence can be traced in *al-Durr: Tuḥfat al-ashrāf bi-ma‘rifat al-aṭrāf* (The gem of the elite for cognizance of the *aṭrāf*).²⁶⁴ This work comprises 19,626 traditions gathered from the six canonical works and some other, minor works. Al-Mizzī’s son-in-law, the exegete Ibn Kathīr, added to this collection traditions he garnered from several significant works. The result was a massive new index of *ḥadīths: Jāmi‘ al-masānīd wa-al-sunan al-hādī li-aqwam sunan* (A compendium of the *musnad* and *sunan* works: a guide to the most upright of prophetic practices).²⁶⁵ A final work of the *aṭrāf* genre that was available to al-Suyūṭī is that of Ibn Ḥajar: *Ithāf al-maharah bi-al-fawā‘id al-mubtakarah min aṭrāf al-‘ashrah*.²⁶⁶ This work is an index to, and a different arrangement of, the traditions which al-Būṣīrī had included in his topically arranged collection described above. As was already indicated, al-Suyūṭī in *al-Durr* once credited Ibn Ḥajar’s *aṭrāf* work.²⁶⁷ On that occasion al-Suyūṭī referred only to Ibn Ḥajar’s

²⁶³ Brown, *Ḥadīth*, p. 60. Brown made no reference to al-Suyūṭī’s use of the work.

²⁶⁴ Jamāl al-Dīn b. al-Ḥajjāj Yūsuf al-Mizzī, *Tuḥfat al-ashrāf bi-ma‘rifat al-aṭrāf*, ed. Bashshār ‘Awwād Ma‘rūf (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1999). Title translation that of Brown in his *Ḥadīth*, p. 60.

²⁶⁵ ‘Imād al-Dīn Abū al-Fidā’ Ismā‘īl b. ‘Umar b. Kathīr al-Dimashqī, *Jāmi‘ al-masānīd wa-al-sunan al-hādī li-aqwam sunan*, ed. ‘Abd al-Malik b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Duḥaysh (Beirut: Lebanon: Dār Khīḍr, 1998). 11 vols.

²⁶⁶ Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Ithāf al-maharah bi-al-fawā‘id al-mubtakarah min aṭrāf al-‘ashrah*, ed. Zuhayr b. Nāṣir al-Nāṣir (Medina: King Fahd Complex for Printing, 1994-99), 16 vols.

²⁶⁷ *Al-Durr*, vol. 7, p. 549.

judgement that a certain *ḥadīth*'s chain is discontinuous. But al-Suyūṭī certainly made further use of that work.

From the above information about the comprehensive *ḥadīth* collections that were available in al-Suyūṭī's day, it is clear that the work of locating traditions had been greatly facilitated. Such prior works paved the way for al-Suyūṭī to embark on his reorganisation of scattered traditions in two major works: a colossal collection of *ḥadīth*, and a huge *ḥadīth*-based exegesis. In his *ḥadīth* collection he intended to include all extant traditions.²⁶⁸ The fruits of his labour, *Jam' al-jawāmi'* (A consolidation of the compendia), also known as *al-Jāmi' al-kabīr* (The large compendium), comprises thirty sections, and is now published in ten volumes.²⁶⁹ The *ḥadīths* therein are arranged alphabetically according to their *aṭrāf*.²⁷⁰ Al-Suyūṭī then decided to select from this encyclopedia all of the statements which were attributed to Muḥammad. These numbered 10,031. Al-Suyūṭī compiled these in a shorter work: *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaghīr* (The small compendium). But al-Suyūṭī soon realised that he had omitted some traditions that deserved inclusion in that shorter collection. Hence he penned *al-Ziyāda 'alā-l-jāmi' al-ṣaghīr* (An addendum to the small collection). The larger collection, its shorter derivative, and the additions to the latter, have been recently combined and published as a single work spanning twenty-one volumes.²⁷¹

²⁶⁸ Brown, *Ḥadīth*, p. 59.

²⁶⁹ Al-Suyūṭī, *Jam' al-Jawāmi': al-jāmi' al-kabīr* (Cairo: Majma' al-Buḥuth al-Islāmīyah, 1970).

²⁷⁰ Brown, *Ḥadīth*, p. 59.

²⁷¹ 'Abbās Aḥmad Ṣaqr and Aḥmad 'Abd al-Jawwād, *Jāmi' al-aḥādīth: al-jāmi' al-ṣaghīr wa-zawā'idihī wa-al-jāmi' al-kabīr li-Jalāl al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Suyūṭī* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1994).

Al-Suyūṭī's *ḥadīth*-based exegesis, *al-Durr*, is essentially also a collection of *ḥadīths*. In *al-Durr* the *ḥadīths* are selected and reorganised according to their relevance to Qur'ānic lemmata. Prior to al-Suyūṭī, *ḥadīths* had been arranged in every conceivable manner. The *musnad* works presented the *ḥadīths* according to the chain of narrators. The *muṣannaf* works grouped the *ḥadīths* topically. And *aṭrāf* works indexed the traditions according to their key clauses. What al-Suyūṭī did in *al-Durr* is that he arranged the traditions under the Qur'ānic lemmata. The Qur'ānic lemmata now serve as captions for groups of traditions which have more or less some connection with those lemmata. Lacking as it does an authorial voice, *al-Durr* is thus largely another sort of arrangement of traditions. In this too, al-Suyūṭī was not without precedent. The exegesis of 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan'ānī followed a fairly similar style of presentation. And the surviving portions of Ibn Abī Ḥātim's *tafsīr* show that he too followed a similar routine. Al-Suyūṭī distinguished his work from those of al-Ṣan'ānī and the son of Abū Ḥātim in two ways. First, al-Suyūṭī included in *al-Durr* a much larger share of traditions. Second, he almost completely excluded his own voice from the work.

Al-Shawkānī (d. 1250/1834) asserted that only a very few exegetical traditions have escaped inclusion in *al-Durr*.²⁷² But many did. In composing *al-Durr*, it was not al-Suyūṭī's purpose to gather all the exegetical traditions he chanced upon. Al-Suyūṭī was not deprived of written works from which to derive such traditions. But two factors explain why *al-Durr* does not include all of the available exegetical traditions. First, *al-Durr* was a hurried effort on the part of the author. Al-Suyūṭī wanted to make his mark in the field of exegesis before the turn of the century at which time he hoped that his claim

²⁷² Muhammad b. Ali b. Muhammad al-Shawkānī, *Fath al-qadīr: al-jam' bayna al-fannay-l-riwāyah wa-l-dirāyah min 'ilm al-tafsīr* (Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazm, 1421/2000) p. 36.

to be the next religious reformer would be accepted. Second, al-Suyūṭī must have been careful to not include all available exegetical traditions lest *al-Durr* should become unduly tedious to read. Al-Suyūṭī already experienced the lack of popular enthusiasm with the prototype of *al-Durr* which contained fewer traditions replete with their *isnāds*. To be significant, *al-Durr* needed to have an impressive size without exceeding the limits of popular enthusiasm.

In order to be more appealing than other similar works, *al-Durr* had to include interesting and rare traditions. It was this latter objective, that of gathering unusual traditions, that sent al-Suyūṭī seeking traditions not only outside of the canonical collections but also beyond the *ḥadīth* corpuses. In his quest for more traditions, he was willing to include *ḥadīths* which were questionable from the point of view of the developed *ḥadīth* sciences. *Ḥadīths* which could not pass the rigours of critical collectors were included for enjoyment in popular books and in books of history. Al-Suyūṭī sought out such traditions from these sources. As was seen above, al-Suyūṭī acknowledged using Ibn ‘Asākir’s history. In fact, he turned frequently to that source. Referring to such histories, Brown wrote: “Their authors were unconcerned with the authenticity of *ḥadīths* in the books, and the works are thus indispensable sources for some of the rarest and most bizarre *ḥadīths* in circulation.”²⁷³

Likewise, al-Suyūṭī made much use of the writings of Abū-l-Shaykh al-Isbahānī (d. 369/979). Al-Suyūṭī cited him in *al-Durr* 3,305 times—a thousand more times than he cited ‘Abd al-Razzāq. That the relatively obscure and late Abū-l-Shaykh should be cited more often than the famous early traditionist and exegete ‘Abd al-Razzāq requires an

²⁷³ Brown, *Ḥadīth*, p. 55.

explanation. A plausible explanation is that Abū-l-Shaykh furnished some of the most wondrous narratives which make *al-Durr* all the more interesting to read. The book most cited of this author in *al-Durr* is his *Kitāb al-‘aẓama* (The book of sublimity).²⁷⁴ This is the source from which al-Suyūṭī obtained, for example, the saying that Ādam used to drink from the clouds.²⁷⁵ Thus in that saying Ādam bears a towering height far more incredible than the sixty cubits he is said to have measured in the canonical stories.²⁷⁶

Books dealing with specific topics appealed to al-Suyūṭī as storehouses of related *ḥadīths* gathered from multiple sources. When al-Suyūṭī needed to discuss similar topics in his *tafsīr*, he knew where to turn. There were, for example, the works of Ibn Abī-l-Dunyā (d. 281/894).²⁷⁷ Al-Suyūṭī declared that he had seen a hundred compositions of Ibn Abī-l-Dunyā.²⁷⁸ However, among the 668 times Ibn Abī-l-Dunyā is cited in *al-Durr*, I could find mention of the titles of only forty-three of his works. In these works al-Suyūṭī found a rich legacy of material on topics that would interest most Ṣūfis. Each book’s title bears the words, “The Book of,” followed by a clear indication of its subject matter. Many of the titles indicate disparagement of the world, its pleasures, and base desires. Many deal with themes related to the heart: repentance, humility, patience, expecting good from God, contemplating the Divine, and remembrance of death. Some of these

²⁷⁴ Abū al-Shaykh al-Aṣbahānī Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. Ja‘far b. Ḥayyān, *Kitāb al-‘aẓamah*, ed. Riḍā’ Allāh b. Muḥammad Idrīs al-Mubarakfūrī (Riyadh: Dār al-‘Āṣimah, 1987-88).

²⁷⁵ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 1, p. 148 in *al-Marjī’*.

²⁷⁶ The canonical height of Ādam was cited elsewhere by al-Suyūṭī from Ibn Abī Hātim. See *al-Durr*, in *al-Marjī’*, vol. 4, p. 432.

²⁷⁷ For a modern study of an individual work of this author see Leah Kinberg, *Morality in the Guise of Dreams: a Critical Edition of Ibn Abī al-Dunyā’s Kitāb al-manām* (Leiden: Brill, 1994) 364 pp.

²⁷⁸ Many of his writings have been published. For a comprehensive collection see Abī Bakr ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. ‘Ubayd b. Sufyān al-Qurashī Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Mawsū‘at rasā’il Ibn Abī al-Dunyā* (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyah, 1993) 5 vols.

works deal with the actions of the tongue: they encourage mentioning God, supplication, and even maintaining silence, but discourage backbiting. Some of these works are hagiographic, recounting the lives of the pious and of those granted long life. One of these works recounts legendary interactions between humans and *jinns*. Two are descriptions of Paradise and Hell.

The two works of Ibn Abī-l-Dunyā most often cited by al-Suyūṭī are *Makāyid al-Shayṭān* (Satan's plots) and *Man 'āsha ba'da al-mawt* (Those who lived after death). These two writings are especially suited to the conveyance of supernatural stories. Now that they have been incorporated into *al-Durr*, such stories serve as diversions from the seriousness of scriptural exegesis. Such books on specific topics made al-Suyūṭī's task of gathering traditions simpler than if he were left to comb the corpuses for *ḥadīths* on similar topics. These works also contributed to *al-Durr* some of its rare and intriguing traditions.

2.8 Summary

Al-Durr is arranged along the lines of classical *tafsīrs* which tend to be running commentaries on the Qur'ān from start to finish. *Al-Durr* thus deals with one segment of the Qur'ān after another covering every chapter in sequence though missing some verses within chapters. The introduction to *al-Durr* does not delineate al-Suyūṭī's hermeneutics. However, we have discovered a few indications of al-Suyūṭī's procedures from a study of *al-Durr* and another of al-Suyūṭī's works: the *Itqān*.

Al-Durr evolved out of an earlier work of al-Suyūṭī, *Turjumān al-Qur'ān*, which was probably never published and is now lost. *Al-Durr* maintains the *musnad* nature of that earlier work. *Al-Durr* is thus, in essence, a collection of *ḥadīths* arranged under

Qur'ānic verses. Whereas in a typical *ḥadīth* collection the traditions are arranged under captions, in *al-Durr* the traditions are arranged under Qur'ānic verses.

It is clear that al-Suyūṭī intended *al-Durr* to serve as the foundation of, and justification for, another exegesis which he initially hoped to write: *Majma' al-baḥrayn*. This other exegesis would have combined the two main streams of exegesis: *tafsīr bi-l-ra'y* and *tafsīr bi-l-ma'thūr*. *Al-Durr*, strictly of the *ma'thūr* stream, provides the traditional raw materials for such a combined commentary. What remained was for al-Suyūṭī to insert his reason-based comments thus achieving the desired combination of tradition and reason. By compiling *al-Durr*, al-Suyūṭī demonstrates a mastery of the tradition which, he maintains, the exegete must attain before venturing into reason-based exegesis.

When al-Suyūṭī abandoned his project of composing *Majma' al-baḥrayn*, he directed his exegetical efforts to his tradition-based *tafsīr* expanding it to make it his ultimate exegesis: *al-Durr*. It was al-Suyūṭī's belief that he was the *mujaddid*, the reformer of religion that must arise at the turn of the century. His ardent wish was that his contemporaries would recognise him as having the necessary qualifications for that role. He thus managed to complete *al-Durr* in the year 898, just in time for it to be added his list of achievements as the century drew to a close.

In the epilogue to *al-Durr*, al-Suyūṭī identified four exeges from the third and fourth centuries which serve as models of the *ma'thūr* genre: those of 'Abd b. Ḥumayd, al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, and Ibn al-Mundhir. These turn out to be al-Suyūṭī's most frequently cited sources. In an extended introduction to *al-Durr*, found in some manuscripts, al-Suyūṭī listed one hundred and one authors whose works he consulted.

Moreover, al-Suyūṭī used four hundred sources altogether in the composition of *al-Durr*. In addition to exegetical works, *ḥadīth* works also served as significant sources. Citations of *tafsīr* works run in parallel with citations of *ḥadīth* works, thus emphasizing the nature of *al-Durr* as a *ḥadīth*-based *tafsīr*. Typically, a tradition is culled from a *tafsīr* work, and traced also to *ḥadīth* collections.

Some reviewers of *al-Durr* have expressed their amazement at al-Suyūṭī's singular achievement in view of the multiple sources he cites for a given tradition. However, it is now clear that al-Suyūṭī made use of reference works which made access to traditions relatively simple. This is not to deny that al-Suyūṭī himself was a *ḥadīth* master. But among the unacknowledged sources which al-Suyūṭī used in compiling *al-Durr*, we have identified several amalgamated *ḥadīth* compilations which served as convenient portals to many other massive collections. Al-Suyūṭī could and naturally did turn to digest collections, supplemental collections, and indices of *ḥadīth*. In these later comprehensive works, he was thus able to locate, on various topics, multiple *ḥadīths* mentioned together with their earlier sources.

A most efficient source for al-Suyūṭī, however, would have been a running commentary on the Qur'ān replete with references to the *ḥadīth* corpuses. The *tafsīr* of Ibn Kathīr served well in this regard, for it not only presents tradition-based exegetical snippets, but also links them to the *ḥadīth* corpuses. Al-Suyūṭī did not acknowledge Ibn Kathīr as a source for the traditions he has included in *al-Durr*. But there are clear indications of al-Suyūṭī's use of Ibn Kathīr's exegesis in the composition of *al-Durr*. Among the evidence of such use is the fact that, in *al-Durr*, al-Suyūṭī refers on occasion to Ibn Kathīr for the latter's judgements on a few traditions. As we have seen, however,

Ibn Kathīr has expressed those very judgements at comparable locations in his own exegesis. Thus it is clear that al-Suyūṭī had Ibn Kathīr’s exegesis open before him as he was composing *al-Durr*.

Chapter 3

Legends and *Isrā'īliyyāt* in *al-Durr al-manthūr*

3.1 Introduction

As John Wansbrough indicated, it is “useful to remember that no writer merely transmits, and that even a compilation reveals principles both of selection and of arrangement.”²⁷⁹ Although *al-Durr al-manthūr* appears to be a mere collection of traditions, the author’s work of selecting and presenting traditions is related to his special interests. The central position occupied by legendary material in many sections of *al-Durr* is not accidental. Legends have played a role in the elaboration of the Qur’ān in the earliest exegetical works available.²⁸⁰ As we will see below, the *tafsīr* of al-Ṭabarī (d. 311/923) contains a large stock of legendary material.²⁸¹ However, there was a later tendency to relegate such fables to the margins of the exegetical stream. Ibn Taymīyah (d. 728/1328) in his *Muqaddimah* dissuaded exegetes from the use of narratives which were derived from Jewish and Christian sources. He dubbed such narratives as Israelite

²⁷⁹ John Wansbrough, *Qur’ānic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) p. 120.

²⁸⁰ Gottfried Hagen has argued that such stories served the essential function of making scriptural teachings accessible to illiterate populations: “These stories provided a comprehensive collection of religious knowledge in narrative form: a cosmology, a history of the revelation, including a narrative framework of the revelation of the Qur’ān itself, and numerous narrative episodes encapsulating the morals and behaviours endorsed by Islam, all in a language that was accessible to an audience that lacked Islamic instruction.” Gottfried Hagen, “From Haggadic Exegesis to Myth: Popular Stories of the Prophets in Islam,” in Roberta Serman Sabbath, *Sacred Tropes: Tanakh, New Testament and Qur’ān as Literature and Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2009) pp. 301-316, p. 314.

²⁸¹ Al-Ṭabarī, Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Jarīr. *Jāmi al-bayān ‘an ta’wīl āy al-Qur’ān: tafsīr al-Ṭabarī* (Beirut: Iḥya al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 2001) vol. 1, pp. 524-27.

traditions (*isrā'īlīyāt*).²⁸² Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1372) took this tendency a step further: he often relates such tales only to impugn them.²⁸³

Since the *tafsīrs* of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr are often regarded as models of tradition-based exegesis, I will here compare these two works with *al-Durr*. From this comparison, it will become clear that al-Suyūṭī rejuvenates the lore in three ways. First, al-Suyūṭī augments the lore by presenting additional, often more interesting, narratives that are not found in the exegeses of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr. Second, after Ibn Kathīr had impugned specific traditions, al-Suyūṭī relates those traditions once more, without adding any disparaging remarks. Thus al-Suyūṭī has reinstated these traditions as valid elements in Qur'ānic exegesis. Third, by presenting the mythological narratives within a string of traditions of other genres, al-Suyūṭī allows them to have a voice on par with the other types of information.

Al-Durr's distinctiveness becomes evident when we compare the manner in which al-Suyūṭī and al-Ṭabarī present traditions in their respective *tafsīrs*. Al-Ṭabarī presents each narrative as being supportive of a particular exegetical view. He evaluates these views, accepting some and rejecting others. Thus he also accepts some of the traditions and rejects others. Therefore al-Ṭabarī tells his readers how to think of the traditions. On the other hand, al-Suyūṭī rarely comments on the traditions he presents. Therefore al-Suyūṭī leaves his readers to form their own impressions about the implications of the traditions. In sum, al-Suyūṭī has boldly brought the legendary material back into focus as

²⁸² Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymīyah, *Muqaddimah fī uṣūl al-tafsīr*, in Musāʿid b. Sulaymān b. Nāṣir al-Ṭayyār, *Sharḥ Muqaddimah fī uṣūl al-tafsīr li-bni Taymīyah* (Damam: Dar Ibn al-Jawzi, 2007-8) pp. 255-58.

²⁸³ Ibn Kathīr al-Dimashqī, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1998) 8 vols., vol. 1, pp. 341-46.

a valid part of the tradition-based exegetical stream after Ibn Kathīr attempted to sideline such material.

Al-Suyūṭī was aware of the growing tendency among Qur’ān exegetes to shun legendary material. In his *Itqān*, al-Suyūṭī cites Abu Hayyān (d. 745/1344) who lambastes earlier exegetes for stockpiling in their *tafsīrs* unnecessary and inappropriate material. These include “inaccurate reports on occasions of revelation, traditions dealing with virtues, unattested stories, and Israelite histories.”²⁸⁴ Al-Suyūṭī also cites Ibn Taymīyah as warning against the narrations of Ka’b and Wahb, converts to Islam famed for their Israelite stories.²⁸⁵

On the other hand, al-Suyūṭī was forthright in acknowledging that his tradition-based exegesis included such material. Introducing those Companions of Muḥammad who were the earliest of Qur’ān exegetes, al-Suyūṭī includes ‘Abdullāh b. ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ. Al-Suyūṭī adds that ‘Abdullāh b. ‘Amr has narrated stories, predictions of tribulations and information about the life hereafter. Al-Suyūṭī admits that ‘Abdullāh b. ‘Amr most likely related this sort of information from the People of the Book. According to al-Suyūṭī, it is likewise from the People of the Book that ‘Abdullāh b. ‘Amr derived his exegesis of the Qur’ānic expression “*fi zūlalin min al-ghamām* (in the shades of the clouds).”²⁸⁶ Al-Suyūṭī then added, “And our book, to which we have [already] pointed, is a compilation

²⁸⁴ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*, ed. Sa’īd al-Mandūh (Beirut: Mu’assat al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyyah, 2004), vols. 3-4, p. 490.

²⁸⁵ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vols. 3-4, pp. 470-71.

²⁸⁶ Quran 2:210. The verse asks, “Are these people waiting for God to come to them in the shadows of the clouds, together with the angels?”

of all such material that was related on the authority of the Companions.²⁸⁷ Al-Suyūṭī was thus referring to the prototype of *al-Durr*, as already detailed in my previous chapter. Therefore, al-Suyūṭī was clear about his intention to include in his tradition-based exegesis the very tales which other exegetes dubbed as *isrā'īlīyāt*.

In fact, one of the salient features of *al-Durr* is its inclusion of a large number of traditions depicting some of the most entertaining stories in the exegetical lore. But some writers of the secondary literature in Arabic have misunderstood the significance of these traditions. For, they often call for someone to remove these stories from *al-Durr* with the aim of cleaning up the work.²⁸⁸ It is now clear, however, that al-Suyūṭī has deliberately included the said stories in his exegesis. To make room for such tales in his work, al-Suyūṭī did not copy all of the other exegetical traditions that were within easy reach. He did not, for example, copy all the traditions of al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr*. As I have shown in my previous chapter, even after al-Suyūṭī has included much legendary material, the total number of traditions in *al-Durr* still does not exceed, though it comes close to, that of al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr*.²⁸⁹ Moreover, al-Suyūṭī has gone to great lengths to acquire reports of his choosing from a variety of sources. He then added these reports to the existing stream of exegetical material. Discarding such narratives from *al-Durr* would deprive the work of one of its distinctive characteristics.

Our comparison of *al-Durr* with the *tafsīrs* of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr is apt, since these other two works have been treated in much of the secondary literature as

²⁸⁷ *Al-Itqān*, vols. 3-4, p. 498.

²⁸⁸ Such, for example is the call in Muḥammad Ḥusayn Al-Dhahabī, *Al-Tafsīr wa-l-mufasssīrūn* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿArabī, 1962) vol. 1, p. 254.

²⁸⁹ See above, p. 56, note 183.

models of the tradition-based genre.²⁹⁰ Al-Suyūṭī himself, as we have seen in my previous chapter, gives pride of place to al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr* as the most outstanding exegetical work. Why then would al-Suyūṭī compose another? My comparison shows that one of his objectives was to revive the stories which Ibn Kathīr worked so hard to eradicate from the exegetical lore.

3.2 The Mountain *Qāf*

A comparison of the commentary on the initial letter of Qur'ān 50:1 will serve to illustrate the relative positions of the three *tafsīrs* vis-a-vis legendary traditions. As we will presently see, al-Ṭabarī mentions a legend without rejecting it; and only through a circuitous route do we discover that he acquiesces in it. On the other hand, Ibn Kathīr not only rails against the tradition, but accuses the Israelites of having invented it. Al-Suyūṭī, for his part, calmly mentions the legend and, to expand its scope, introduces traditions that supplement those found in the other two *tafsīrs*.

In Abdel Haleem's translation, the Qur'ān's 50th chapter begins:

Qāf
By the glorious Qur'ān!²⁹¹

²⁹⁰ Jane Dammen McAuliffe's essay on traditional *tafsīrs* already reflects in its title the estimate of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr as the scholars who best represent the tradition. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "Qur'ānic Hermeneutics: The Views of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr" in Andrew Rippin, ed., *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). Likewise Norman Calder, in attempting to define traditional *tafsīrs*, did not look beyond Ibn Kathīr for a later example of a work whose features may serve to inform such a definition. Norman Calder, "Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr: Problems in the Description of a Genre, Illustrated with Reference to the Story of Abraham" In *Approaches to the Qur'ān*, eds. G. R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (London: Routledge, 1993), 101-140).

²⁹¹ M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an: A New Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Translation of Qur'ān 50:1. The initial letter is offset in the translation as shown.

The word given in the translation as “*Qāf*” is the name of the Arabic letter ق. The implication of such a disjointed letter, standing alone, has eluded every exegete. This unexplained phenomenon affects twenty-nine Qur’ānic surahs, some beginning with one such disjointed letter; some with two, three, four, or five.²⁹² However, my concern here is not with the phenomenon of the disjointed letters (*hurūf muqaṭṭa’āt*) in general. My concern is specifically with the suggestion that the letter ق of Qur’ān 50:1 refers to a mythological mountain whose name, *Qāf*, is identical to the name of the letter ق.²⁹³

Al-Ṭabarī mentions three opinions on the question. First, *Qāf* is one of the names of God. Al-Ṭabarī presents a tradition attesting to this view.²⁹⁴ Second, *Qāf* is one of the names of the Qur’ān. Al-Ṭabarī also proffers a tradition in favour of this view. Third, *Qāf* is “the name of the mountain which surrounds the earth (*ism al-jabal al-muḥīṭ bi-l-ard*).”²⁹⁵ At the present location in his exegesis, al-Ṭabarī offers no further elaboration of this view, and supplies no tradition in its support. Rather, he directs his readers to his exegesis of early chapters of the Qur’ān where he had explained the significance of the disjointed letters. Indeed, his elaboration of Qur’ān 2:1 covers the subject in substantial detail.²⁹⁶ Yet even there he does not deal directly with the letter *Qāf* of Qur’ān 50:1, and

²⁹² See, for example the beginning of *sūras* 2, 3, 19, 20, 36, and 42.

²⁹³ The tenacity of pre-scientific conceptions in the *tafsīr* works is remarkable. John North writes: “For a long time, there was a tendency for theologians . . . to be content with the old folk astronomy, but with the rapid influx of new learning in the first two centuries of Islam, pressure was brought to bear on even them.” John North, *Cosmos: An Illustrated History of Astronomy and Cosmology* (Chicago: University Press of Chicago, 2008) p. 190. See also Anton Heinen, ed., *Islamic Cosmology: A Study of al-Suyūfī’s al-Hay’ā assanīya fī l-hay’ā as-sunnīya* (Beirut: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1982).

²⁹⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, Abū Ja’far Muḥammad b. Jarīr. *Jāmi al-bayān ‘an ta’wīl āy al-Qur’ān: Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī* (Beirut: Iḥyā al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 2001) vol. 26, p. 169.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 102.

he makes no mention of the mythological mountain. But we gather from his exegesis of Qurʾān 2:1 that some commentators viewed the Qurʾān's disjointed letters as abbreviations of nouns and verbs.²⁹⁷ In his final analysis of Qurʾān 2:1, al-Ṭabarī accepts a multiplicity of interpretations of the disjointed letters, including the interpretation that they are abbreviations of nouns and verbs.²⁹⁸ Having seen al-Ṭabarī's treatment of the disjointed letters at Qurʾān 2:1, I now return to Qurʾān 50:1. It is now clear that al-Ṭabarī, to be consistent, must accept that *Qāf* is all three: a name of God, a name of the Qurʾān, and the name of the mountain surrounding the earth. Yet he did not explicitly embrace the view that *Qāf* is the name of such a mountain.

Ibn Kathīr, on the other hand, mentioned the myth only to chide the Jews for inventing it, and the unsuspecting Muslim scholars for importing it.²⁹⁹ He writes that, though God knows best, “this is one of the myths (*khurāfāt*) of the Israelites which some Muslims relayed from them.”³⁰⁰ Ibn Kathīr acknowledges the principle that it is permissible for Muslims to relay from the Israelites such information that is not denied by

²⁹⁷ Ibid, vol. 1, p. 102.

²⁹⁸ Ibid, pp. 108-9.

²⁹⁹ Blaming the Jews for these traditions is a common theme in Muslim writings. Yet, as Marianna Klar writes, the paucity of manuscripts and questions of dating make it difficult to decide in the case of many such tales whether they were transferred from others to Muslims or from Muslims to others. We can only say that such material was in common circulation. See Marianna Klar, “Stories of the Prophets” in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qurʾān*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009) p. 341. See also Judith Romney Wegner, “Exegetical Excursions from Judaism to Islam,” published electronically in, *Textures and Meaning: Thirty Years of Judaic Studies at the University Press of Massachusetts Amherst*, ed. L. Ehrlich et al. (Department of Judaic and Near Eastern Studies, University Press of Massachusetts Amherst, 2004) 284-96, pp. 293-94.

³⁰⁰ Ibn Kathīr al-Dimashqī, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1998) vol. 7, p. 3285. Ibn Kathīr is referring here to the principle, mentioned in a *ḥadīth*, that such information as coincides with the Islamic revelation should be affirmed; such information that is disconfirmed by Islam should be denied; and such information that is neutral with regards to Islam's approved sources may be reported without criticism lest one should unknowingly deny a truth.

Muslim traditions. But, as far as Ibn Kathīr is concerned, the tale of Mount *Qāf* and other such tales are of a different order. He writes that such tales are “the inventions of some of the *zanādiqah* (freethinkers or non-believers) from among the Israelites; with such inventions the *zanādiqah* sought to confuse people in matters of faith.”³⁰¹ Ibn Kathīr explains that such Israelite inventions mirror Muslim inventions of prophetic *ḥadīths* and tales of the ancients.³⁰² In the light of such Muslim concoctions, Ibn Kathīr asks his readers what may be expected of the People of Israel. He gives several suggestions as to why the Israelite traditions should be more suspect in the eyes of Muslims. For example, Ibn Kathīr suggests that the Israelites existed as a people for a longer period than did Muslims. Hence Israelite traditions were transmitted over a longer period. Moreover Ibn Kathīr presumes that the Israelites did not develop tradition-criticism to the degree of sophistication achieved by Muslims. Finally, Ibn Kathīr accuses the Israelite scholars of corrupting the very words of God.³⁰³

After offering his reasons for suspecting Israelite traditions, Ibn Kathīr admits that Muḥammad said: “Transmit from the Israelites, and there is no harm.”³⁰⁴ But Ibn Kathīr argues that the prophet only intended to permit the conveyance of such information as the intellect accommodates. Ibn Kathīr is certain that Muḥammad did not mean for Muslims to narrate from the Israelites that which the intellect judges to be impossible or baseless;

³⁰¹ Ibid, p. 3285.

³⁰² Ibid, p. 3285.

³⁰³ Ibid, p. 3285. Gordon Nickel has shown that the earlier exegetes were more cautious in the matter of such dogmatic assertions about earlier communities deliberately corrupting God’s scriptures. See Gordon Nickel, *Narratives of Tampering in the Earliest Commentaries on the Qur’ān* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

³⁰⁴ Cited in Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 40, and again with reference to the present discussion, p. 3285.

and that which the preponderance of opinion determines to be false. Hence the report about Mount *Qāf* does not fall within the permissible limits, though, again, Ibn Kathīr adds, “God knows best.”³⁰⁵ That indecisive last comment reflects Ibn Kathīr’s inner turmoil as he finds himself here momentarily advancing reason over tradition.

Nonetheless, Ibn Kathīr laments that many exegetes, ancient and modern, have reported in their books the stories of the People of the Book. To Ibn Kathīr, the Muslim exegete should have no need for such information. He complains that even al-Rāzī (d. 604/1207) has explained *Qāf* by adducing a strange report (*athar gharīb*) on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās (d. 68/687). But, according to Ibn Kathīr, the chain of authorities (*sanad*) of that tradition is not authentic (*laa yaṣiḥḥ*).³⁰⁶ After relaying from al-Rāzī the *ḥadīth* which asserts that *Qāf* refers to the encompassing mountain, Ibn Kathīr impugns it with the following arguments. First, there are disconnections in its chain of authorities. Second, the report runs contrary to another related from Ibn ‘Abbās via Ibn Abī Ṭalḥah (d. 143/760) to the effect that *Qāf* is one of God’s names. Third, the questionable report from Ibn ‘Abbās is transmitted by way of Mujāhid.³⁰⁷ But, the confirmed opinion of Mujāhid himself on the question of *Qāf* is that it is a mere letter of the alphabet as are the other disjointed letters occurring at the head of other *sūrah*s of the Qur’ān.³⁰⁸ Thus, for

³⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 3285.

³⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 3285.

³⁰⁷ He is Mujāhid b. Jubayr (d. 104/722).

³⁰⁸ Mujāhid thus tells his listeners nothing they do not already know.

Ibn Kathīr, it is unlikely that Mujāhid transmitted the questionable report on Ibn ‘Abbās’ authority.³⁰⁹

Notwithstanding Ibn Kathīr’s criticisms of that *ḥadīth*, al-Suyūṭī presented it in *al-Durr* along with three others in support of the view that *Qāf* refers to a mountain. According to the *ḥadīth* which Ibn Kathīr impeached, and al-Suyūṭī now reproduces, beyond this earth is a sea that encompasses it. Beyond that sea is a mountain, called *Qāf*, over which the lowest heaven (*al-samā’ al-dunyā*) flutters (*mutaraḥrifah*). Beyond that mountain is another earth seven times the size of the first one. Even that earth is surrounded by a sea. Beyond that sea is another mountain, called *Qāf*, over which the second heaven flutters. The narrative continues in this way to include seven earths, seven mountains, and seven heavens.³¹⁰

Ibn Kathīr had given reasons to doubt the ascription of the above narrative to Ibn ‘Abbās. However, al-Suyūṭī includes another narrative, also attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās, which affirms the existence of mount *Qāf*. This other narrative provides the etiological explanation of as to how earthquakes affect particular localities. Mount *Qāf* has roots leading to the rock on which the earth rests. When God wishes to cause an earthquake under a certain village, he orders the mountain which then quakes the root connected to that village. This explains why the quake affects one village and spares others.³¹¹

Likewise, Ibn Kathīr had doubted that Mujāhid attributed the myth to his teacher on the basis that Mujāhid himself held a different view on the question. But al-Suyūṭī

³⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 3285.

³¹⁰ Ibn Kathir, vol. 7, p. 3285; *al-Durr*, vol. 13, pp. 612-13.

³¹¹ *Al-Durr*, vol. 13, p. 613.

includes a narrative that now has Mujāhid himself saying that *Qāf* is a mountain that circumscribes the earth.³¹² Hence al-Suyūṭī defended the imputation of the said view to both Ibn ‘Abbās and his student, each an outstanding exegete.³¹³ Al-Suyūṭī adds yet another narrative on the authority of ‘Abdullāh b. Buraydah who said that *Qāf* is a mountain of emerald surrounding the world; on it are the two flanks of the sky.³¹⁴ In this way, al-Suyūṭī has increased the list of early authorities who spoke of Mount *Qāf*.

Al-Suyūṭī has not only saved the legend from Ibn Kathīr’s attempt to sideline it. Al-Suyūṭī has now made it central to his own exegesis of the verse. He has furnished six traditions in the present exposition. Four of those defend the view that *Qāf* is a mountain. Of the other two, one each supports each of the two other views which we already know from al-Ṭabarī: that *Qāf* is a name of God; and that it is a name of the Qur’ān. Thus al-Suyūṭī, has done more than al-Ṭabarī, to advance the belief in Mount *Qāf*. Al-Ṭabarī had mentioned no tradition in support of the view that *Qāf* designates a mountain. However, he mentioned a tradition each in support of the other two views. Moreover, al-Ṭabarī was not forthright in embracing the said view. At first glance it appeared that he was non-committal towards it. When we traced his wider discussion on disjointed letters we discovered that he must, for consistency, accept that the letter *Qāf* would be an initial for a noun. In that case, *Qāf* would be the name of a mountain encompassing the earth.

³¹² *Al-Durr*, vol. 13, p. 613.

³¹³ On the transmission of tafsir through Mujāhid, see Fred Leemhuis, “Origins and Early Development of the *tafsīr* Tradition,” in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur’ān*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) p. 19.

³¹⁴ ‘Abdullāh b. Buraydah is listed among the fourth-generation *ḥadīth* transmitters in Scott Lucas, *Constructive critics, Ḥadīth literature, and the articulation of Sunnī Islam: the legacy of the generation of Ibn Sa’d, Ibn Ma’in, and Ibn Ḥanbal* (Leiden: Brill, 2004) pp. 64-65, n. 2.

3.3 The Ascension of Idrīs

The prophet Idrīs, mentioned in Muslim sources, is variously identified in the very sources as either Enoch or Elijah of the Tanakh.³¹⁵ The Qur’ān’s mention of Idrīs is very brief:

Mention too, in the Qur’ān, the story of Idrīs. He was a man of truth, a prophet. We raised him to a high position.³¹⁶

The three *tafsīrs* treat several issues arising from these two verses, but I will focus here on their attitudes towards legendary material. We will see again that al-Ṭabarī is willing to entertain a tale, Ibn Kathīr dismisses it, and al-Suyūṭī reintroduces it while adding a supply of more interesting traditions. Al-Ṭabarī mentions that Ibn ‘Abbās had asked Ka‘b about the second of these two verses, the one that reads, “We raised him to a high position (Qur’ān 19:57).” Ka‘b informed Ibn ‘Abbās, in the presence of the tradition’s narrator, as follows. God had informed Idrīs that when the good deeds of humans are raised to God each day Idrīs’ deeds are found to be equal to the sum of everyone else’s. This information only inspired Idrīs to increase his supply of such deeds. Therefore, when one of the angels, a close friend of his, accosted him, Idrīs asked him to request the angel of death to grant him respite so that he could continue doing good deeds. Idrīs’ friend then carried him between his wings, rising up to meet the angel of death. The latter, on his way down, met them in the fourth heaven. The friend makes the

³¹⁵ That Idrīs is identified as Enoch see Uri Rubin, “The Qur’ānic Idea of Prophets and Prophethood,” in Uri Rubin, *Muhammad: the Prophet and Arabia* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2001) II, p. 19. That he is also identified with Elijah see Brannon Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran: An Introduction to the Quran and Muslim Exegesis* (New York: Continuum, 2002) p. 243. On the Biblical background of Qur’ānic stories see Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur’ān and Its Biblical Subtext* (New York: Routledge, 2010) and several articles in Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur’ān and Its Historical Context* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

³¹⁶ Qur’ān 19:56-57, trans. M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, p. 193.

request, and the angel of death asks, “Where is Idrīs?” The friend answers, “He is the one on my back.” “What a surprise,” exclaimed the angel of death. He then explained that he had been commissioned to seize Idrīs’ soul in the fourth heaven, and he wondered how he might accomplish such a task seeing that Idrīs was on earth. He then took Idrīs’ soul on the spot. This explains the verse.³¹⁷

Al-Ṭabarī embraces the view that God took Idrīs alive to the fourth heaven. Al-Ṭabarī also mentioned an alternative view: that Idrīs was taken to the sixth heaven.³¹⁸ The above tradition is just one of several al-Ṭabarī has adduced to prove that it was the fourth heaven to which Idrīs was taken. The tradition incidentally supports the view that Idrīs ascended alive, even if only to meet his death. But al-Ṭabarī says nothing either by way of approbation or disapprobation of the details of the story. Ibn Kathīr, on the other hand, disapproves of some unspecified aspects of the tale. He writes that in relation to the verse in question al-Ṭabarī has furnished “a wondrous, strange narrative.”³¹⁹ After citing the narrative, Ibn Kathīr added, “This is one of the Israelite tales of Ka‘b al-Aḥbār. Some of its contents are objectionable. God knows best.”³²⁰

Ibn Kathīr then mentioned from Ibn Abī Ḥātim (d. 327/938) two other narratives which run along the same lines as seen from the story above.³²¹ The first of these

³¹⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, vol, 16, p. 112-13.

³¹⁸ Ibid, p. 112.

³¹⁹ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 5, p. 2230.

³²⁰ Ibid, p. 2231.

³²¹ Unfortunately, none of the narratives to be discussed here in connection with Qur’ān 19:57 appears in what remains of Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr Ibn Abī Ḥātim* (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob Al-Ilmiya, 2006) 7 vols. The surviving reconstructed work contains only three short traditions to explain 19:56 and 57 (see *Tafsīr*, vol. 6, p. 187). According to the first tradition, Idrīs was before Noah. God sent him to command his people to say, “There is no god but God,” and then to do as they pleased, but they refused. So God

traditions is similarly based on Ka‘b’s answer to Ibn ‘Abbās, and offers interesting variations to some of the details in the above narrative. Here Idrīs asks his friend not for respite, but merely to enquire as to what remains of his lifespan. When the question was put to the angel of death, the latter confessed that he could not tell until he first looks into the record. But having looked, he said, “You are asking me about a man of whose lifetime nothing remains but the twinkling of an eye.” Idrīs’ friend then looked under his wing only to discover that Idrīs had already been snatched away.

As reproduced by Ibn Kathīr, the second of Ibn Abī Ḥātim’s reports does not challenge the details of al-Ṭabarī’s tradition. Ibn Abī Ḥātim’s second report merely establishes Idrīs’ exceptional piety: Ibn ‘Abbās narrates that Idrīs was also a tailor who said “Glory be to God,” with every thrust of his needle.³²² Nothing is said of Ka‘b in connection with this report. Ibn Kathīr has written nothing in favour or against the two additional narratives from Ibn Abī Ḥātim. However, the basic thread of Ibn Abī Ḥātim’s traditions is the same as that of al-Ṭabarī’s tradition; and the tenor of all these traditions is equally legendary. Hence it is clear that Ibn Kathīr intends his blanket Israelite label to cover all of these traditions.

Al-Suyūṭī, however, expresses no reservation with regards to the above two reports from Ibn Abī Ḥātim. He reproduces them both.³²³ He did not copy the report as found in al-Ṭabarī. In any case, the contents of al-Ṭabarī’s report are amply represented

destroyed them. According to the second, God raised Idrīs to the sixth heaven, and he died there. According to the third, which has a sound (*hasan*) *sanad* reaching back to Ibn Mas‘ūd, Idrīs is Ilyās (Elijah). The editor neglected to number this last tradition.

³²² As cited in Ibn Kathīr, p. 2231.

³²³ *Al-Durr*, vol, 10, pp. 83-85.

in the two variations given by Ibn Abī Ḥātim. Nonetheless, al-Suyūṭī has included additional legendary material in his exegesis of the pair of verses. First, deserving of only brief mention here, is another report derived from Ibn Abī Ḥātim, which he in turn reported on the authority of al-Suddī.³²⁴ This report gives essentially the same information as the report seen above from al-Ṭabarī. However, in the present report it was in the sixth heaven where Idrīs and his angelic friend met the angel of death as the latter was descending from the presence of God. When asked where he was headed, the angel of death declared that his purpose was to snatch the soul of Idrīs in the sixth heaven. That is when Idrīs' friend saw the earthling near his feet still quivering after his death that very instant. Idrīs was then placed by his friend in the sixth heaven.³²⁵ This report has the obvious emphasis on the sixth heaven, thus supporting the other opinion in favour of which al-Ṭabarī offered no tradition. It also has the benefit of introducing another authority, al-Suddī, to support the veracity of the story.

Another report offered by al-Suyūṭī, again from Ibn Abī Ḥātim, is even more interesting than the preceding ones. This narrative makes *malak al-mawt* (the angel of death) himself the friend of Idrīs. One day, Idrīs asked his friend to give him a taste of death. The angel was flabbergasted. Everyone in heaven and earth flees from death, and yet his dear friend wants to experience it?³²⁶ But Idrīs insisted. The angel acknowledged that he has no say in the matter.³²⁷ So he went up to God and received his permission.

³²⁴ He is Ismā'īl b. 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Suddī (d. 127/745).

³²⁵ *Al-Durr*, vol, 10, p. 95.

³²⁶ That people are fleeing from death is an allusion to the Qur'ān 62:8.

³²⁷ The allusion here to Qur'ānic 3:128 shows the Muslim character of the legend, and points away from its characterization as an Israelite tale.

After causing Idrīs' death, the angel of death was unable to restore Idrīs' soul to him. But the angel of death beseeched God who returned the soul, and Idrīs thus remained alive for as long as God willed. Idrīs further insisted that the angel shows him Paradise. The angel obtained God's permission for this too, for, as the angel admitted, "God knows more than I do about Idrīs."³²⁸ The angel of death therefore carried Idrīs into Paradise where Idrīs remained for as long as God wished. But when the angel signalled the end of the visit, Idrīs refused to leave, on two grounds. First, he should not return to die for a second time.³²⁹ Second, God has said: "From it they will not be expelled," and Idrīs was not about to leave on his own accord.³³⁰ The angel called on God to adjudicate between them. God declared not only that Idrīs is right, but also that Idrīs is more knowledgeable than the angel. For these reasons, God declares that Idrīs should stay in Paradise and the angel should depart. This explains the verse (Qur'ān 19:57).³³¹

The Islamic character of the story is evident throughout, for it explains some of the puzzles confronting Qur'ānic exegetes. The story explains how Idrīs made his way into Paradise before the usual time and why he remains alive therein. Thus al-Suyūṭī's present narrative goes further than the others seen above. For, in the other narratives,

³²⁸ The allusion here is to Qur'ān 2:30 ff. God taught Ādam all the names, then demanded the angels to announce the names (2:31); but they confessed that they knew no more than God had taught them (2:32). At God's prompt, however, Ādam recounted the names, and that set the stage for God to confound the angels with his declaration that he, God, knows all things in the heavens and the earth, including the thoughts of the angels (2:33). The angel's confession in the present narrative is an effect, felt many times over in Muslim stories, of that primordial incident.

³²⁹ Idrīs' first argument is put in a similar form to his second argument, where a mere citation of the words of God suffices to make the point. His citation is close to but not quite the Qur'ānic statement, "After the one death they will taste death no more . . . (Qur'ān 54:56)."

³³⁰ Qur'ān 15:47. Translation mine.

³³¹ *Al-Durr*, vol, 10, pp. 94-95.

Idrīs' death marks the end of his epic. Moreover, the present narrative indirectly deals with anxieties arising from another verse, Qur'ān 2:30. In Qur'ān 2:30, the angels ask God why he would create a vicegerent on earth who will cause corruption therein and shed blood. God informs the angels that he, God, knows what they do not. In the verses that followed Qur'ān 2:30, God demonstrated to the angels that even Ādam, having been taught by God, knew more than they do (Quran 2:31-33). Now it is clear from Idrīs' epic that one of Ādam's descendants also knows more than does the angel of death. Idrīs was able to confound the angel by citing verses from the Qur'ān long before the Qur'ān was revealed.

The last tradition to be cited here from al-Suyūfī's explication of Qur'ān 19:57 spans seven pages in his work, not only because it is the most elaborate account of Idrīs' ascension, but also because it includes the story of two fallen angels.³³² I will treat the latter legend separately under my next caption. I shall continue here with the story of Idrīs. According to this narrative, Idrīs divides his week: for three days he teaches people; and for the remaining four days he travels off on his own to engage in worship. The angel of death loved Idrīs for the sake of God. Therefore, the angel assumed human form and beseeched Idrīs on one of his journeys to take him on as a disciple.³³³ Idrīs, not knowing the true identity of his would-be disciple, attempted to dissuade him, saying, "You will

³³² *Al-Durr*, vol, 10, pp. 86-93.

³³³ This is the reverse of the Qur'ānic story in which Moses becomes the disciple of a mysterious teacher (Qur'ān 18:65-66). Now prophet teaches angel, and the allusions to the Moses story should not be missed.

not have the ability to accompany me.”³³⁴ But the angel assured Idrīs that God will grant him the ability.³³⁵ Hence they journeyed together.

In the latter part of the day, Idrīs and his disciple passed by a shepherd. The angel suggested that, seeing that they do not know where they will end up that evening, they would do well to grab a stray kid from the shepherd’s flock. This way, they will have something to eat at the time of breaking their fast.³³⁶ However, Idrīs was appalled by the suggestion that he should carry off what is not his. Moreover, he was confident that God always provides for him by evening. Then and there, Idrīs forbade his companion from ever repeating such a suggestion.³³⁷ That night, Idrīs received his ration as usual, and he invited his friend to share the food. But the angel stayed aloof after offering the excuse that he had no appetite. Hence Idrīs ate alone. Then they stood up and prayed together. Idrīs eventually grew tired and his vigour subsided, but his companion did not let up. Amazed at the fervour of his friend, Idrīs began to think that he has finally met his match: one who is more devout than he is.

The following day, the angel of death made an unethical suggestion similar to the one he made the day before: he now proposed that they pluck a bunch of grapes in anticipation of their evening meal. Idrīs again reproved him. That evening, they followed

³³⁴ *Al-Durr*, vol, 10, p. 87. This situation parallels al-Khiḍr’s censure of Moses: “Did I not tell you that you will not be able to be patient with me?” Moses submits, “If I ask you about anything after this, then do not let me accompany you” (Qur’ān 18:75-76).

³³⁵ Moses assures his mysterious teacher that he will be patient and obedient if that should be the will of God (Qur’ān 18:68-69).

³³⁶ The storyline thus presumes that Idrīs and his companion were fasting during the day.

³³⁷ Likewise, Moses is warned to not pester his guide with questions, but to wait for his guide to explain events (18:70).

a routine similar to that of the previous night. But now Idrīs openly questioned the corporeal appearance of his companion; and his companion confessed that he was in fact the angel of death.³³⁸ However, Idrīs was now puzzled for another reason. Over the last three days and nights of their companionship he had not observed the angel of death taking the soul of anyone.³³⁹ The angel explained that the entire world in relation to him is like a dining table before a man who may easily reach for anything he wishes thereupon. Hence, over the last few days, the angel of death had not slackened in his responsibility to collect souls.

As in the previous version of the story, Idrīs seized the opportunity to ask for a taste of death.³⁴⁰ The angel of death deferred to God who granted the required permission. Idrīs fell to the ground dead. God restored him. The angel wiped the face of his beloved friend, saddened that such should be the outcome of their companionship. But Idrīs was grateful for the experience. Now he wanted more. Could the angel of death grant him a glance at the fire of Hell? The angel resisted, since he hoped that this prophet would never need to worry about encountering Hell. Yet Idrīs hoped that such a moment's encounter with the fire will help increase his fear of it. So he went with the angel of death to a door of Gehenna. When he saw the furious flames he fell unconscious. The angel was again remorseful over the turn of events, but Idrīs, on awakening, was grateful for the experience.

³³⁸ *Al-Durr*, vol, 10, p. 88.

³³⁹ Something is missing from the story, for, on our count this conversation occurs on the second night since they met.

³⁴⁰ *Al-Durr*, vol, 10, p. 88.

Now Idrīs had one last request. Could he be shown Paradise for a moment, in which case his enthusiasm for it would increase? The angel’s counsel could not dissuade Idrīs from this wish either, and off they went to Paradise. When the door of Paradise was opened for Idrīs, he was delighted at its cool and fragrant breeze. Now he wanted to enter and taste the fruits and water—this too for the purpose of increasing his zeal for Paradise. But, after he was granted the requested entrance into Paradise, he clung to a tree and refused to leave. Nevertheless, he offered to debate with any or all of the angels over his right to remain in Paradise. God thus granted him a hearing.

Compared with the previous narrative, the present one shows Idrīs to be more astute in citing Qur’ānic verses and relating them to his triple experience of death, Hell and Heaven. He presented three arguments. First, God has said, “Every soul will taste death (Qur’ān 3:185),” and Idrīs has tasted the one which God prescribed for him.³⁴¹ Second, regarding, Hell, God said, “But every single one of you will approach it, a decree from your Lord which must be fulfilled” (Qur’ān 19:71) and Idrīs had approached it. Will he be subsequently returned to it seeing that God had prescribed for his creatures to approach it only once? His third argument is the same as his second from the previous narrative: God has declared that the inhabitants of Paradise will not be expelled.

No answer comes from the angel of death or from any other angel. God, moderating this debate, declares to the angel of death in Idrīs’ favour, “He has debated you and defeated you with a strong proof.” Moreover, God announces that all of these events were in his foreknowledge prior to his creation of Idrīs. He knew that Idrīs’ death

³⁴¹ Obviously, it does not follow from the said verse that death should be experienced only once. But Idrīs nevertheless gets by with the argument.

would be only for a moment, that he would have his brief encounter with Hell, and that he would enter heaven at the very hour, as transpired. Hence the present narrative answers more of the exegetical and theological questions that plagued Muslim scholars. In this version of the story, the angel not only admits to Idrīs' superiority, but becomes his disciple. Not only does the angel submit in the face of Idrīs' knowledgeable exposition of scripture, but God has his moment of glory over the angels who once questioned his decision to create humans.

In the report examined earlier, Idrīs had not experienced Hell. Hence a question remained. What of Qur'ān 19:71 insisting that everyone must inevitably come to it? This exegetical problem is solved in the present version of the story. Moreover, the tough philosophical problem of predetermination is addressed in the present legend. Idrīs negotiated his way into Paradise using a nibbling method of requesting one little favour following another. And his scriptural exegesis justified his permanence in Paradise. Yet, according to the report, these events in the life and death of Idrīs do not represent the slightest deviation from God's predetermination of all affairs.

Having come to the summit of the saga of Idrīs, however, we have seen how the three exegeses recount the reports. Al-Ṭabarī reported the story of Idrīs' encounter with an angel who rose with Idrīs to the fourth heaven only to unwittingly facilitate the seizure of his soul at that location. Al-Ṭabarī did not object to that report. Ibn Kathīr reproduced the report, but only to censure it as an Israelite tale foisted on the Muslims through the channel of Ka'b al-Aḥbār. Ibn Kathīr added details from two other reports, but his generalization about *isrā'īlīyāt* would apply also to those anecdotes. Al-Suyūfī, on the other hand, reproduces the reports without criticizing them. Moreover, he adds several

wondrous accounts including a most developed legend which answers exegetical and theological problems confronting Muslim scholarship. This comparison makes it clear that al-Suyūṭī has brought the legend back into a central position in the discussion of the meaning of Qurʾān 19:56-7. The tale was only marginal in al-Ṭabarī. It was sidelined in Ibn Kathīr. It is now the main feature in *al-Durr*. In *al-Durr*, several lengthy reports are brought into the service of retelling the tale; whereas only some extremely short narratives deal with other issues arising from the verses.

3.4 Fallen Angels

We return now to the last part of the above narrative, that portion dealing with the fable of the fallen angels. Qurʾān 2:102 is the locus classicus in exegeses for the story of the seduction of the angels Hārūt and Mārūt.³⁴² The part of that verse that is most relevant to the issue at hand is as follows:

And [they] followed what the evil ones had fabricated about the Kingdom of Solomon instead. Not that Solomon himself was a disbeliever; it was the evil ones who were disbelievers. They taught people witchcraft and what was revealed in Babylon to the two angels Hārūt and Mārūt. Yet these two never taught anyone without first warning him, ‘We are sent only to tempt—do not disbelieve. From these two they learnt what can cause discord between man and wife’³⁴³

The Muslim commentators considered many issues arising from this part of the verse, but we shall concentrate here on some of the main issues related to the mention of Hārūt and Mārūt. Who were Hārūt and Mārūt? Were they really angels, as the above translation reads, and as the original Arabic indicates? If so, did the angels teach

³⁴² On the foreign origin of these two names see Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qurʾān* (Leiden: Brill, 2007) pp. 282-83.

³⁴³ Quran 2:102, trans. Abdel Haleem, p. 12.

reprehensible magic? And what is the story behind their sojourn on earth? Moreover, what is to be said of the legend that the two angels attempted to seduce a woman who then tricked them into committing abominable sins before she was finally transformed (or transformed back) into the planet Venus?

As we explore these questions in the *tafsīrs* of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Suyūṭī, we will see emerging again the pattern with which we are already familiar from other examples above. It will be found that al-Ṭabarī welcomes legendary narratives, Ibn Kathīr does his best to lambaste them, and al-Suyūṭī brings them back into sharp focus with more flair. We will also discover that al-Suyūṭī has done more to further the present legend than he has done for the ones above. He has recounted the story also at Qurʾān 2:30 and again, as we have intimated, in the Idrīs saga. In this way al-Suyūṭī, alone of the three exegetes, refused to limit the legend to its locus classicus. Al-Suyūṭī has thus enhanced the prominence of the story by introducing it at various locations in his exegesis.

As al-Ṭabarī explains, some exegetes before him found it problematic that angels would teach magic.³⁴⁴ Some such exegetes held that Hārūt and Mārūt were humans.³⁴⁵ In support of that position, some exegetes depended on the reading *malikayn* (two kings) whereas the received reading, which al-Ṭabarī supports, is *malakayn* (two angels).³⁴⁶ As al-Ṭabarī points out, some other exegetes depended on a reordering of the words of the verse. Thus they avoided the verse's plain statement that Hārūt and Mārūt taught divinely

³⁴⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 1, p. 520.

³⁴⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 1, p. 528.

³⁴⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 1, p. 528. For more on variant readings of the Qurʾān, see Chapter 7 below in the present study.

inspired magic.³⁴⁷ However, according to al-Ṭabarī, it is possible for angels, acting on divine instructions, to tempt people by teaching them magic. He argues that, while the practice of magic is prohibited, learning the art is not forbidden. Al-Ṭabarī adds that the angels delivered strict warnings against the potential misuse of the knowledge they were imparting—this being a temptation from God. Moreover, the angels were teaching a lesser type of magic, that which causes husbands and wives to dislike each other. With these considerations in mind, al-Ṭabarī has no difficulty accepting the straight reading of the verse.

Having accepted that Hārūt and Mārūt were angels, and that they taught a type of magic, al-Ṭabarī presents nine accounts of the legend that will confirm his view.³⁴⁸ The outline of the fable found among many of these traditions is as follows. The events took place either during the era of Idrīs or during the reign of Solomon (Sulaymān). God betted the angels that if they were to be burdened with basic human desires they would commit sins similar to those of Ādam’s descendants. Two angels, Hārūt and Mārūt, took up the challenge and were thus sent to earth.

But they were soon attracted to a woman of exceptional beauty—either a woman of Persia, or an incarnation of Venus (*al-zuharah*). They attempted to seduce her, but she began to lay out conditions for any carnal encounter with them. Perhaps they would kill a person? Or might they be willing to worship an idol? Or, would they drink some wine? Usually, the reports have them first imbibing the wine. In a drunken state, they had sex;

³⁴⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 1, p. 520. On *taqdīm wa ta’khīr*, the interpretive strategy of advancing and retracting the Quran’s wording, see Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur’ān and Its Biblical Subtext* (New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 214-16.

³⁴⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 1, pp. 524-27.

then they killed a man who saw them in the act. When they sobered up, the woman informed them that they had done everything she demanded of them.

According to some reports, the woman laid a condition that the angels should first teach her the greatest name of God, or whatever it is that they utter to enable their ascension into heaven and their descent from it. Upon learning the secret, she used it to ascend to the sky. But God caused her to forget the return formula. God then transformed her such that she remains as Venus. As for the angels, they attempted to ascend with her, but found heaven's gates closed to them. In mid-air they also discovered that their wings were suddenly ineffective. Hence their fall to earth was literal. They were then made to choose either to receive their punishment in this world or to wait for their outcome in the life hereafter. Knowing the punishment of this life to be limited, that is what they chose. Some reports have them fettered and hung in Babylon where they must remain until Judgement Day. It is there, in captivity, that they began to teach sorcery. Al-Ṭabarī did not express any consternation over the contents of the traditions which he presented in his exegesis on the story of the fallen angels, and which I have summarized above.

Turning now to Ibn Kathīr, we find a contrasting situation. Ibn Kathīr mentioned all the reports from al-Ṭabarī and added some from other exegetes. But, in relating these traditions, Ibn Kathīr intends to root out every trace of the legend. In the first place, he sides with those who deny that Hārūt and Mārūt were angels. Having retraced al-Ṭabarī's fair presentation of the arguments of those who claimed that Hārūt and Mārūt were mere men, Ibn Kathīr then expresses his dismay that al-Ṭabarī

proceeded to refute that view . . . and to claim that Hārūt and Mārūt were angels whom God caused to descend to the earth and that God permitted them to teach magic as a test and trial for his servants . . . and to claim that Hārūt and Mārūt

were, in their teaching, merely obeying God and acting according to God's commands.³⁴⁹

Ibn Kathīr would have none of this. To him, God would not permit the angels to teach magic after he had sent his messengers to declare that it is forbidden to teach magic.³⁵⁰ Thus Ibn Kathīr concludes that al-Ṭabarī's arguments are very strange.³⁵¹ Hence Ibn Kathīr had to disparage the *ḥadīths* which al-Ṭabarī had advanced, and, for good measure, denounce other reports of the legend from other sources including the *tafsīr* of Ibn Abī Ḥātim.³⁵² Ibn Kathīr usually begins with a scrutiny of the chain of narrators (*sanad*). But if he fails to find some fault with the chain of narrators he would then remark that the contents of the *ḥadīth* are strange or unacceptable.

For example, Ibn Kathīr mentions a *ḥadīth* from Aḥmad in which ʿAbdullāh b. ʿUmar curses Venus for having seduced the angels during the days of her incarnation. Ibn Kathīr then remarks, "This is a *gharīb* (strange) *ḥadīth* with this wording."³⁵³ Then he mentions two other narratives with alternative wordings and concludes, "And these two are also very strange."³⁵⁴ Then he adds that although ʿAbdullāh b. ʿUmar attributes his belief to the prophet Muḥammad, it is more likely that ʿAbdullāh b. ʿUmar obtained the information from Kaʿb al-Aḥbār who in turn incorrectly credited such a belief to

³⁴⁹ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 340.

³⁵⁰ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 340. Ibn Kathīr thus supposes the prohibition of teaching magic to predate Muslim traditions.

³⁵¹ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 340.

³⁵² Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 341-46.

³⁵³ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 341.

³⁵⁴ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 341.

Muḥammad.³⁵⁵ Ibn Kathīr then supports his assertion with several traditions revealing Kaʿb as Ibn ʿUmar’s source.³⁵⁶ This leads him to conclude: “Hence the *ḥadīth* revolves and returns to the transmission of Kaʿb al-Aḥbār who in turn narrated it from the books of the Israelites.”³⁵⁷

Ibn Kathīr then turns his attention to a *ḥadīth* attributed to ʿAlī. After some discussion, Ibn Kathīr concludes that the *isnād* is good, and the transmitters are reliable, but the *ḥadīth* is *gharīb jiddan* (very strange).³⁵⁸ He writes that another report on the same authority is not reliable with its given wording.³⁵⁹ And yet another is not authentic, but rather *munkar jiddan* (very objectionable).³⁶⁰ Curiously, he narrates a *ḥadīth* on the authority of both Ibn Masʿūd and Ibn ʿAbbās without raising an objection.³⁶¹ According to that *ḥadīth*, as in others in my summary of the story above, the angels came to earth, and Venus came down to them in the form of a beautiful Persian woman named Baidhakht.³⁶² Then they fell into error (*fa-waqaʿā bi-l-khaṭīʿah*). When they were given

³⁵⁵ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 341-42.

³⁵⁶ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 342.

³⁵⁷ Ibn Kathīr’s caps his conclusion with deference to God’s knowledge. But here we shall avoid repeating the stock phrase, “God knows best.”

³⁵⁸ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 342.

³⁵⁹ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 342.

³⁶⁰ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 342.

³⁶¹ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 342-43.

³⁶² Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 343. For the vocalization of the name see J. Cooper, *The Commentary on the Qurʾān by Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī: being an abridged translation of Jāmi al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) p. 485. According to some of the other traditions, the name Baidhakht is Nabatean, and the woman is, alternatively, named Anāhīdh in Persian.

the choice between being punished here or in the hereafter, they chose the former.³⁶³ This *ḥadīth*, which Ibn Kathīr was either unable or unwilling to undermine, does not specify the error into which the angels fell.

Another *ḥadīth*, which Ibn Kathīr obtained from Ibn Abī Ḥātim, is related on the authority of Mujāhid and, in turn, from ‘Abdullāh b. ‘Umar.³⁶⁴ It includes all the basic features of the legend as outlined above, although with some interesting variations. For example, in this *ḥadīth*, the woman lays the condition that they mate in the sky so as to avoid her husband. Ibn Kathīr rates the *isnād* as good all the way to ‘Abdullāh b. ‘Umar. But, as seen above, Ibn Kathīr had already presumed that another narrative on the subject, likewise traced to Ibn ‘Umar, was due ultimately to Ka‘b. Ibn Kathīr similarly presumes that Ibn ‘Umar derived the present narrative also from Ka‘b. As we will see below, al-Suyūfī cites Ibn Kathīr as saying that this is an authentic chain up to Ibn ‘Umar; and al-Suyūfī skips Ibn Kathīr’s supposition that the narrative originated with Ka‘b. Meanwhile, Ibn Kathīr reveals his anxiety about the contents of the present narrative. It says, as does the one above on ‘Alī’s authority, that Venus descended in the form of a beautiful woman. And Ibn Kathīr considers that suggestion extremely strange.³⁶⁵

The *ḥadīths* on the subject, however, are too many for Ibn Kathīr to deny all the elements of the fable. Hence he finds some relief in the fact that the next *ḥadīth* he relates does not say that the woman was Venus before the seduction, or that she went skyward

³⁶³ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 343.

³⁶⁴ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 343.

³⁶⁵ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 343.

afterwards.³⁶⁶ In this tradition, the woman, in comparison to other women, was as beautiful as is Venus in comparison to other planets. This version, says Ibn Kathīr, is more likely. He also gives the chain of narrators an excellent rating. He reports that al-Ḥākim (d. 405/1014) graded the *ḥadīth* authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) according to the criteria of al-Bukhārī (d. 256/869) and Muslim (d. 261/874) though the latter two did not include it in their collections.³⁶⁷

The chain of the next *ḥadīth* in Ibn Kathīr, attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās, receives no criticism.³⁶⁸ Its contents are somewhat different from what we have seen above. In this tradition three angels are selected for the wager. One eventually opts out, leaving the famed two. The woman they fall for is an earthling named Manāhiyah. They drink her wine, worship her idol, and slay her neighbour's son. She learns the secret of ascension and becomes Venus. Hārūt and Mārūt then choose the earthly punishment, but they are nonetheless left suspended between heaven and earth without further explanation. This narrative, too, says Ibn Kathīr, contains strange and objectionable material. Yet, he confesses, "God knows best what is correct."³⁶⁹

By now, Ibn Kathīr's zeal for scrutinizing the *isnāds* of the *ḥadīths* on Hārūt and Mārūt has lessened. He says nothing specifically about the authenticity of the remaining four narratives related to the present discussion.³⁷⁰ Nor does he continue to express

³⁶⁶ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 344.

³⁶⁷ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 344.

³⁶⁸ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 344.

³⁶⁹ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 344.

³⁷⁰ See *ḥadīths* in Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, pp. 345-46.

caution at the strangeness of the texts. Rather, he makes a summary statement following the thirteen traditions that form that section of his exegesis. In his summary he first admits that a large number of the Companions' successors have related the story of Hārūt and Mārūt. He then names some of the most significant Successors in this regard. In the end, however, Ibn Kathīr castigates the story, with its details, as being a product of Israelite sources. He maintains that there is no authentic *ḥadīth* from the prophet Muḥammad on the subject. He concludes the discussion by affirming his faith in the literal wording of the Qur'ān and in whatever it is that God intended by the story which God related in the Qur'ān only in brief. Finally, Ibn Kathīr assures himself and his readers that, after all, God knows best the reality of the situation.³⁷¹

Hence Ibn Kathīr finds himself in a strange quandary. His instincts reject the strange details of the legend, but those details are contained in reports some of which are credited to Companions of Muḥammad. Tried as he did, Ibn Kathīr could not condemn the chains of all of the traditions he had before him. He had to resort to the blanket supposition that their strange contents derived from questionable sources. There are of course two ways of impeaching a tradition: either by dismissing its content or by disparaging its chain of narrators. But, as Brown explained, if the chain of narrators was known to be sound, the later tradition-critics generally refused to censure its contents.³⁷² The *ḥadīth* movement stressed that truth was decided not by the intellect, but by transmitted revelation. The earliest Muslims were presumed to have understood the faith

³⁷¹ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 346.

³⁷² For details on the scholars from 'Ā'ishah to Ibn al-Qayyim who were known for applying rational standards in criticizing traditions see Jonathan Brown, "How We Know Early *Ḥadīth* Critics Did *Matn* Criticism and Why it is So Hard to Find," in *The Ḥadīth: Critical Concepts in Islamic Studies* ed. Mustafa Shah, vol. 3, pp. 179-212.

best. If a bit of information was reliably transmitted from the earliest Muslims, such information served to distinguish between what is physically possible and what is fantasy. The intellect was not considered a sound epistemological foundation. Al-Ṭabarī's commitment to that principle made it impossible for him to rule out the tale on rational grounds.³⁷³ Hence Ibn Kathīr is on weak ground maintaining the line of tradition and yet objecting to the contents of traditions the *isnāds* of which he is unable to impeach.

In *al-Durr*, on the other hand, al-Suyūṭī reproduces the above traditions without making any attempt to impugn them. We know that al-Suyūṭī was copying traditions from al-Ṭabarī, since he often acknowledges al-Ṭabarī as his source. We also know that al-Suyūṭī had his eyes on the *tafsīr* of Ibn Kathīr.³⁷⁴ As already indicated above, al-Suyūṭī here cites the judgement which Ibn Kathīr declared on a *ḥadīth* in the comparable section of the latter's *tafsīr*.³⁷⁵ Therefore, it is no surprise that al-Suyūṭī has absorbed from al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr all the traditions they have advanced in favour of the legend of Hārūt and Mārūt. All of al-Ṭabarī's nine traditions on this subject were absorbed by Ibn Kathīr who added another four from other sources. Al-Suyūṭī's comparable section contains twenty-two traditions recounting the tale.³⁷⁶ Hence he has not only ignored Ibn Kathīr's negative remarks on the traditions, but has increased the stock of traditions.

³⁷³ For the development of this principle, and al-Ṭabarī's commitment to it see Tarif Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) p. 76.

³⁷⁴ In my previous chapter, I have offered evidence proving al-Suyūṭī's dependence on Ibn Kathīr in general, and with reference to some specific sections of *al-Durr*. In the present section of *al-Durr*, al-Suyūṭī dependence on Ibn Kathīr is again evident.

³⁷⁵ Al-Suyūṭī, vol. 1, p. 515.

³⁷⁶ Al-Suyūṭī, vol. 1, pp. 507-34.

The first of Ibn Kathīr's traditions does not appear in al-Suyūṭī's treatment of Qur'ān 2:102 which mentions Hārūt and Mārūt. Al-Suyūṭī noticed that the *ḥadīth* in question, as distinct from the others, can serve as commentary on Qur'ān 2:30 which deals with the creation of Ādam. Hence al-Suyūṭī has shifted the *ḥadīth* to that location. We shall return below to a discussion of al-Suyūṭī's use of the fable of the fallen angels in connection with Qur'ān 2:30 and other verses.

In the present section, the *ḥadīths* which al-Suyūṭī has added to the discussion are mostly variations on the main storyline with which we are already quite familiar. The added narratives serve mainly to increase the reader's confidence in the tale after Ibn Kathīr has attempted to reduce that confidence. Ibn Kathīr denied that the story of Venus' transformation reaches back to the authority of the prophet Muḥammad. In response, al-Suyūṭī has sourced a *ḥadīth* which is traced back to Muḥammad. Al-Suyūṭī reproduced the said *ḥadīth* from three sources including the exegete Ibn Mardawayh (d. 401/1010) and the *ḥadīth* specialist al-Daylamī (d. 558/1163).³⁷⁷ That *ḥadīth* has Muḥammad saying that thirteen things, including Venus, have been transformed.³⁷⁸

Some of the narratives considered above end by saying that after Hārūt and Mārūt were fettered in Babylon they began to teach magic. These narratives do not elaborate on the magic which the angels taught. However, al-Ṭabarī did introduce a long narrative in this regard. A comparison of the treatment given to that narrative across the three

³⁷⁷ Shahrudār b. Shīrawayh al-Daylamī compiled a famous *ḥadīth* collection: *Musnad al-Firdaws*. See Jonathan Brown, *Ḥadīth: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (New York: Oneworld, 2009) p. 41. See also al-Daylamī, *Kitāb Firdaws al-akhbār bi-ma'thūr al-khiṭāb al-mukharraj 'alā kitāb al-Shihāb*, ed. Fawwāz Aḥmad al-Zamirī and Muḥammad al-Mu'taṣim billāh al-Baghdādī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1987).

³⁷⁸ Al-Suyūṭī, vol. 1, pp. 531-32.

exegetical works will again show how al-Suyūfī sought to reintroduce fables into exegesis.

I begin by summarizing al-Ṭabarī's version.³⁷⁹ Unaware that Muḥammad had recently died, a young woman from the people of Dūmat al-Jandal came to seek his counsel. Only 'Ā'ishah could now counsel and comfort her. When the woman stopped crying, she related her story. Her husband had left her. To win him back, she began to comply with the sage advice of an old woman who, at nightfall, brought two black dogs. The two women rode the dogs to Babylon where they found two men hung by their feet. The young woman wanted to learn magic, but the men warned her as in Qur'ān 2:102: "We were only sent as a temptation—so do not disbelieve." The young woman confesses now to 'Ā'ishah that she refused that warning. The men therefore told her to go and urinate on a certain pile of ashes. Being terrified, she pretended to carry out the instruction. But when they asked her about the vision they expected her to receive thereupon, she had to admit that she saw nothing. Thus her ruse became evident. They seized the opportunity to insist again that she must go home and give up her interest in sorcery. But she persisted. After the same drama was repeated three times, she finally urinated on the pile of ashes. This time she saw what the men expected her to see: a masked horseman rising up into the sky and, eventually, out of her range of vision. That, explained the men, was her faith leaving her.

Then the men sent the young woman home. She thought she had learnt nothing, but the old woman assured her that whatever she subsequently wished for will occur. "Take this wheat," said the old woman, "and sow it." She did sow it. Then she said,

³⁷⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 1, pp. 529-30.

“Sprout!” and the seed sprouted. She then commanded the sprout to burgeon forth, and then to ripen and harden and be milled and baked. She thus saw that her commands were being carried out precisely at every stage. Nevertheless, the whole experience has left her horror-struck. In sum, she repented and now pledges to ‘Ā’ishah that she will never again resort to witchcraft.³⁸⁰

Al-Ṭabarī did not deny the reality of the story. Ibn Kathīr did not know what to make of the story. On the one hand, he wrote, “A strange narrative with a wondrous tale has occurred, and it is our wish to warn against it.”³⁸¹ He then recounted the narrative attributing it to al-Ṭabarī. On the other hand, he added that the *isnād* of that narrative is good up to ‘Ā’ishah from whom Hishām b. ‘Urwah related the tale.³⁸² Ibn Kathīr was thus ambivalent about the veracity of the story. Al-Suyūṭī, however, was not ambivalent about the story but simply recounted it.³⁸³ Then he added another narrative that could only serve to shore up the present one.³⁸⁴ In the narrative just considered, as found in the three *tafsīrs*, the teachers of magic are not named. But the report added by al-Suyūṭī does name them as Hārūt and Mārūt.³⁸⁵

What al-Suyūṭī added is a lengthy narrative which I will summarize here. The reporter of that narrative had gone to see ‘Abd al-Mālik b. Marwān, and found in the

³⁸⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 1, pp. 529-30.

³⁸¹ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 346.

³⁸² Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 347.

³⁸³ Al-Suyūṭī, vol. 1, p. 525.

³⁸⁴ Al-Suyūṭī, vol. 1, pp. 526-29.

³⁸⁵ Al-Suyūṭī, vol. 1, p. 526.

latter's assembly a man who declared that he had met Hārūt and Mārūt.³⁸⁶ The unnamed man in the assembly could not hold back his tears once he began to relate the story of his encounter with the fallen angels. He informed the assembly that in his childhood he did not meet his father. His mother used to provide for him and give him money which he spent wastefully. Yet more money was always available. He was naturally curious about this continuous supply of money, but his mother assured him that it was better not to enquire about that. On his insistence, however, his mother took him to a house full of wealth, all of it his. Again, his mother cautioned him against asking about the source. She cautioned him even for a third time. But she eventually relented and informed him that his father was a sorcerer, the wealth being the fruits of his magic.

Time passed, the wealth diminished, and the boy/man decided to follow in his father's footsteps.³⁸⁷ Hoping to learn magic, he went to see a close confidant of his father in another district. But the friend of his father cautioned him against this goal. After a repetitious interchange of insistence followed by admonition, the father's friend capitulated and agreed on an appointment. On the appointed day, the warnings and persistence again alternated until the father's friend said, "Fine. I'll get you into a place, but you are not to mention God therein."³⁸⁸ He eventually came to that place, entered it, and descended approximately three hundred steps.³⁸⁹ At the bottom he saw the winged

³⁸⁶ Al-Suyūfī, vol. 1, p. 526. 'Abd al-Mālik b. Marwān was caliph from 685-705 C.E. See G. R. Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam: The Umayyad Caliphate AD 661-750*, 2nd edition (New York: Routledge, 2000) p. 58.

³⁸⁷ The storyteller's age is unclear at this point in the story, but when he visits his father's friend the latter refers to him as a man (*rajul*). Al-Suyūfī, vol. 1, p. 527.

³⁸⁸ Al-Suyūfī, vol. 1, p. 527.

³⁸⁹ Al-Suyūfī, vol. 1, 528.

Hārūt and Mārūt hanging in chains. He exclaimed, “There is no god but God.”³⁹⁰ Then they flapped their wings violently, and screamed aloud for an hour. When they subsided, the visitor again mentioned the Muslim formula of faith. They acted as before. The visitor proclaimed it a third time, and they were similarly agitated. When calm returned, the visitor did not repeat the provocation.³⁹¹ Looking at him, they asked, “Are you human?” He affirmed, and asked them about their response to the faith-formula. They explained that they had not heard that name (i.e. the name of God) since they went out from under the throne (of God). On their further questioning, the visitor revealed that he is a follower of Muḥammad. The angels were thus surprised to learn that Muḥammad’s era had arrived.³⁹²

The positioning of the storyteller in the court of the caliph ‘Abd al-Mālik was not accidental, for the political aspect of the story will now become apparent. The angels ask a series of questions, receive the answers, and then give puzzling responses to the answers. They ask the visitor if people are united around a single leader.³⁹³ Surprisingly, the angels are not happy to hear that this is so. They ask further if people are getting along with each other, and are pleased to learn that people are not enjoying good mutual relations. They ask if buildings have reached the lake Tiberius and are saddened to

³⁹⁰ Al-Suyūṭī, vol. 1, p. 528.

³⁹¹ The motif of the thrice repeated scenarios in these stories is severely strained at this point. The visitor would have spent the last three hours observing the agitation of the angels, prolonged by his own thoughtless utterance, without a word about the purpose of his visit.

³⁹² Al-Suyūṭī, vol. 1, p. 528.

³⁹³ Al-Suyūṭī, vol. 1, pp. 528-29.

discover that developments have not yet reached that stage.³⁹⁴ On the visitor's request, the angels explained their puzzling responses. As long as people are united around one man, Judgement Day will not arrive. The angels expected that Judgement Day is near when they heard that people are at loggerheads. On the other hand, that fateful day will be forever in the future unless buildings reach Tiberius. The visitor asked for advice, and the angels replied, "If you are able to do without sleep then do so, for the matter is serious."³⁹⁵

Thus the story concludes without a climax. Nonetheless, the story serves to rally Muslims behind a single caliph, and to caution them against disunity.³⁹⁶ By including this narrative in his exegesis, al-Suyūṭī shows that he was determined to make his work more entertaining than those of his fellow tradition-based exegetes. Moreover, it is clear that he made the extra-canonical narratives more central to the task of exegesis.

3.5 The Explanatory Power of the Fable of the Fallen Angels

Al-Suyūṭī expanded the explanatory power of the story of the fallen angels beyond its locus classicus to explain two other verses: Qur'ān 2:30 and 19:57. The first of these two verses, Qur'ān 2:30, deals with the angels' question about the wisdom of Ādam's creation. Most of the *ḥadīths* on the legend of Hārūt and Mārūt considered above either presume or acknowledge a historical setting after the human population had

³⁹⁴ Al-Suyūṭī, vol. 1, p. 529.

³⁹⁵ Al-Suyūṭī, vol. 1, p. 529.

³⁹⁶ I will return to the political aspect of al-Suyūṭī's exegesis in Chapter 6 of the present study.

increased somewhat.³⁹⁷ Some narratives explicitly situate the story in the era of either Idrīs or Solomon. According to some narratives, the angels scoffed at the manner in which human judges falter. Hārūt and Mārūt were then sent among humans to prove themselves as fair judges. It was in such a circumstance that the woman in question came seeking a judgement against her husband only to find herself being propositioned by Hārūt and Mārūt.³⁹⁸

Al-Suyūfī noticed, however, that one of those *ḥadīths* can situate the legend immediately after Ādam’s descent to earth, for it begins by stating: “When Ādam was caused to go down upon the earth”³⁹⁹ Moreover, that *ḥadīth* does not involve any terrestrial interaction between angels and humans except for Venus incarnate. Hence al-Suyūfī included that *ḥadīth* in his exegesis of Qur’ān 2:30 dealing with the story of Ādam. That is the same *ḥadīth* which Ibn Kathīr included at the top of his list of *ḥadīths* on Hārūt and Mārūt in his commentary of Qur’ān 2:102.⁴⁰⁰ Thus having already mentioned the *ḥadīth* at that earlier location, when al-Suyūfī comes to address the verse mentioning Hārūt and Mārūt, he did not repeat the *ḥadīth* there. Instead, he states that he has already mentioned the *ḥadīth* of Ibn ‘Umar in relation to the story of Ādam, and that he will now present the remaining narratives on the issue at hand.⁴⁰¹ This is a rare

³⁹⁷ On legends related to Ādam’s creation see M. J. Kister, “Ādam: A Study of Some Legends in *Tafsīr* and *Ḥadīth* Literature,” in Joel Kraemer, ed., *Israel Oriental Studies XIII* (1993) pp. 113-174; and its shorter version, “Legends in *Tafsīr* and *Ḥadīth* Literature: The Creation of Ādam and related Stories” in Andrew Rippin, ed., *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur’ān* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) pp. 82-116.

³⁹⁸ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 345.

³⁹⁹ Al-Suyūfī, vol. 1, pp. 239-40.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 341.

⁴⁰¹ Al-Suyūfī, vol. 1, p. 507.

occasion when al-Suyūṭī has cross-referenced *ḥadīths* in his work. Al-Suyūṭī has done his best to buttress this narrative as well after Ibn Kathīr had deemed it to be of Israelite origins. Ibn Kathīr had given a single written source for this tradition. Al-Suyūṭī added four other sources, naming both the books and their authors in each case.⁴⁰²

To be sure, Ibn Kathīr did mention Hārūt and Mārūt in his exegesis of the Ādam story.⁴⁰³ But there he does not give what he himself calls the *qiṣṣah* (story) of Hārūt and Mārūt. There Ibn Kathīr explains the origin of the angels' questioning of God's wisdom. He refers to a *ḥadīth* given by Ibn Abī Ḥātim in which it is mentioned that *al-sijill* (the scribe) is an angel among whose helpers were Hārūt and Mārūt.⁴⁰⁴ According to that *ḥadīth*, there were three moments each day when *al-sijill* was permitted to look into the heavenly record of God's foreknowledge (*ummu-l-kitāb*). But once he took an unlicensed look. Thus he discovered, in advance, the creation of Ādam and what that entails. Then he confided these details to Hārūt and Mārūt. Hence, when God announced: "I am about to create a vicegerent on earth," Hārūt and Mārūt replied, in a display of pride in the face of the other angels, "Are you going to create one who will cause mischief and shed blood therein?"

Ibn Kathīr castigates the report as a strange one (*athar gharīb*). He adds that, even if the chain of authorities is reliable, the contents must have been "transmitted from the People of the Book, for it contains objectionable material which it is necessary to

⁴⁰² Al-Suyūṭī, vol. 1, p. 239.

⁴⁰³ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 229.

⁴⁰⁴ On the foreign origin of *al-sijill* see Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān* (Leiden: Brill, 2007) pp. 163-64.

reject.”⁴⁰⁵ He adds that the report is incoherent and, for that reason, his negative verdict on it is vindicated. The incoherence of the narrative is seen where it mentions that the two angels replied to God. The preface to their speech ought to have the dual form in Arabic: *qālā* (the two of them said). Instead, the tradition incorporates a portion of Qur’ān 2:30 according to which many angels speak. The tradition thus inappropriately imported the plural form *qālū* (they said), implying more than two speakers.⁴⁰⁶

While dealing with Qur’ān 2:30 on the story of Ādam, al-Suyūṭī did not introduce the narrative which says that *al-sijill* took an unauthorized look into the master record and then informed Hārūt and Mārūt of what he saw. At that location, Ibn Kathīr’s objection about the grammatical difficulty with the narrative was forceful, given the context of Qur’ān 2:30. However, al-Suyūṭī quietly saved the narrative for later, to reproduce it at Qur’ān 21:104, which is the locus classicus for the exegesis of *al-sijill*.⁴⁰⁷ There al-Suyūṭī supports the narrative by mentioning an additional source for it: Ibn ‘Asākir (d. 571/1176).⁴⁰⁸ Ibn Kathīr does not mention that narrative at Qur’ān 21:104.⁴⁰⁹ Neither does al-Ṭabarī.⁴¹⁰ Hence al-Suyūṭī is unique in mentioning the narrative at Qur’ān 21:104, and in keeping the memory of Hārūt and Mārūt alive at this additional location in his work.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 229.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 229.

⁴⁰⁷ Al-Suyūṭī, vol. 10, p. 396.

⁴⁰⁸ Al-Suyūṭī, vol. 10, p. 396.

⁴⁰⁹ See Ibn Kathīr, vol. 5, pp. 2349-52.

⁴¹⁰ See al-Ṭabarī, vol. 17, pp. 117-20.

3.6 Connecting the Ascension of Idrīs with the Fall of the Angels

Qur’ān 19:57, which deals with the ascension of Idrīs, is the other main location in *al-Durr* where al-Suyūfī introduced the legend of Hārūt and Mārūt.⁴¹¹ There al-Suyūfī presents the tradition which links the legend of Idrīs to that of the fallen angels.⁴¹² We have already studied the first part of this tradition above—the portion dealing specifically with Idrīs. I will now address the portion dealing with Hārūt and Mārūt. It is important to note from the start, however, that among the three exegetes being compared here, al-Suyūfī’s alone has sought out and included this extended saga which links the two stories.

We have seen that the first part of that evolved epic answers exegetical and theological questions related to Idrīs and his early entry into Paradise. We will now see that the second part answers questions related to Hārūt and Mārūt which were not addressed by the other versions of their story examined above. In the previously examined tales, the wager is a result of the angels’ mismeasuring of man. They cringe at the crimes of Ādam’s children, and God assures them that if they were given human desires they too would fall into human errors. In the present account, however, the story of Hārūt and Mārūt has a very different beginning that colours the entire anecdote. In this version they admire the piety of one of Ādam’s sons, and they are challenged to take on a human role and equal Idrīs in devotion.

⁴¹¹ Al-Suyūfī, vol. 10, p. 91-93.

⁴¹² There is an indication that the two legends may have already been linked in the Slavonic account of Enoch. See Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur’ān* (Leiden: Brill, 2007) p. 283.

The story begins with Idrīs being permanently lodged in Paradise.⁴¹³ The angels remonstrate with God. They had been created thousands of years before Idrīs, and have worshipped him without failing even for the blink of an eyelid. How is it that Idrīs enters Paradise before them? God explains that it is no surprise that the angels act as they do. That is what they have been created for and equipped to accomplish. Idrīs, on the other hand, had been burdened with human desires in a world where sinful outlets for such desires were numerous. Yet Idrīs avoided every sin but preferred God’s desire over his own, God’s pleasure over his own, and what God loves over what he himself loves.⁴¹⁴ God explains that if the angels would become humans and do the deeds of Idrīs they would be promoted to a status similar to that of Idrīs. However, the angels are forewarned that if they fail they would be admitted among the wrongdoers (*ẓālimūn*). The angels in general chose to retain their favour with God and to avoid the possibility of being punished.⁴¹⁵ Only three of the angels were willing to undergo the ordeal: Hārūt, Mārūt, and one unnamed angel of good standing.⁴¹⁶

The previously examined versions of the story presented a problem for Islamic angelology. In those versions the angels were implicated as a group. They had all thought it preposterous that they would ever commit the sorts of sins they knew of humans. God asked them to select two of their best, and the implication was that Hārūt and Mārūt, duly selected by them, would represent the lot. But in the present version they decline the

⁴¹³ Al-Suyūṭī, vol. 10, p. 91.

⁴¹⁴ Here the *ṣūfī* side of al-Suyūṭī’s exegesis is evident.

⁴¹⁵ So reads the narrative in the plural; otherwise, the very next sentence here shows that not all the angels made that choice.

⁴¹⁶ Al-Suyūṭī, vol. 10, p. 92.

offer—all but the three. Therefore, only the three are culpable for accepting the challenge and then failing to fulfil it. The fall of even one angel is problematic, as seen above in Ibn Kathīr’s denial that any angel ever taught magic. Yet this version of the story has been improved in favour of Muslim orthodoxy by maintaining the innocence of the angels in general while restricting guilt to the three exceptions.

More remarkable, however, is the mention of punishment at this early stage in the saga. In all the other versions the mention of punishment is made only after the fact of the crime. Yet in those versions no one complains that the punishment which Hārūt and Mārūt received was not an explicit part of the bargain. In the present, polished version, however, God’s fairness is more evident. Hence, with the introduction of this version of the story, al-Suyūfī has answered some of the puzzles and difficulties found in the other versions.

Moreover, in this version of the story, God thoroughly orients the three angels towards their task. He specifically warns them in advance that he will not forgive them if they should worship an idol, or shed blood, or drink wine, or have illegitimate sex. What is new here is not the list of sins, but the denial of forgiveness. That this too is made a part of the agreement from the start justifies the prolonged pitiable punishment of Hārūt and Mārūt.

Even Venus gets a slight makeover in the present portrayal. In this version as well, to be sure, the incarnate angels first make the request for illicit sex and Venus shrewdly tricks them. In the present adaptation, however, God is said to be the one who

tests the angels by means of Venus.⁴¹⁷ Moreover, as the story unfolds, the enticement (*al-fitnah*) itself is personalized as the subject who seduces the angels.⁴¹⁸

The angels too, appear slightly better. Not only is God testing them, as already seen, but, only in this version of the story, they are said to be subject to divine predestination. Hence they are attracted to Venus “due to what God intended (*li-mā arāda Allāh*), and due to what was predetermined for them in the knowledge of God (*wa li-mā sabaqa ‘alayhim fī ‘ilmih*).”⁴¹⁹ Moreover, their error was due to the fact that God had abandoned them (*ma ‘a khidhlān Allāh iyāhum*).⁴²⁰ We have seen in a previously considered version that the third angel soon opted out of the exercise. But in this version when the angel felt tempted (*fa-lammā aḥassa bi-l-fitnah*) God protected him (*‘aṣamahu*) and he was thus saved.⁴²¹ On the other hand, Hārūt and Mārūt continued in their error due to what had been predestined for them (*wa aqāma Hārūt wa Mārūt li-mā kutiba ‘alayhim*).⁴²² Hence the blame shifts to the finger of fate, and the angels do not appear as bad as they did in the other versions of the story.

There are other aspects of this rendition that deserve attention. But our point here is made. Al-Suyūṭī went past the other two *tafsīrs* and selected this rendition from the *tafsīr* of Ibn Abī Ḥātim. Al-Suyūṭī stated that this report has a good chain (*sanad ḥasan*)

⁴¹⁷ Al-Suyūṭī, vol. 10, p. 92.

⁴¹⁸ Al-Suyūṭī, vol. 10, p. 93.

⁴¹⁹ Al-Suyūṭī, vol. 10, p. 92.

⁴²⁰ Al-Suyūṭī, vol. 10, p. 92.

⁴²¹ Al-Suyūṭī, vol. 10, p. 92.

⁴²² Al-Suyūṭī, vol. 10, p. 92.

on the authority of Ibn Mas‘ūd.⁴²³ As we have seen, with this and other such stories, al-Suyūfī sought to restore the legendary narratives to a central position in exegesis after Ibn Kathīr had attempted to disassociate them from the enterprise.

3.7 Al-Suyūfī’s Influence on Subsequent Exegeses

What remains now is for us to see how al-Suyūfī’s efforts to enhance the status of legendary materials in exegesis has affected two subsequent exegeses, that of al-Ālūsī and al-Shawkānī. As Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī has demonstrated, al-Ālūsī was determined to disparage all such fanciful materials that he mentions in his exegesis.⁴²⁴ However, as we will now see, al-Suyūfī’s exegesis of Qur’ān 2:102 on the mention of the two angels has influenced al-Ālūsī. Al-Ālūsī began his commentary here by presenting a fair outline of the story of Hārūt and Mārūt.⁴²⁵ Then he mentioned several scholars who disparaged the story, including one who stated that belief in the legend constitutes disbelief (*kufr*), especially since the Qur’ān attests to the infallibility (*‘iṣmah*) of the angels. Then al-Ālūsī wrote:

Imam al-Suyūfī opposed those who denied the story by showing that Imām Aḥmad, Ibn Ḥibbān, al-Bayhaqī, and others have related it on the prophet’s authority and also on the authority of ‘Alī, Ibn ‘Abbās, Ibn ‘Umar, and Ibn Mas‘ūd with many authentic chains. One who looks into this will almost certainly decide in favour of the authenticity of the story seeing the numerous narratives and the strength of their chains.⁴²⁶

⁴²³ Al-Suyūfī, vol. 10, p. 86.

⁴²⁴ Muḥammad Husayn al-Dhahabī, *al-Isrā’īliyyāt fī-l-tafsīr wa-l-ḥadīth* (Cairo: al-Jumhūrīyah lil-Ṣiḥāfah, 2008) vol. 3, p. 82ff; Al-Ālūsī, *Rūh al-ma’ānī: tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘aẓīm wa-l-sab’ al-mathānī* (Beirut: Dar al-Fīkr, no date).

⁴²⁵ Al-Ālūsī, vol. 1, p. 537.

⁴²⁶ Al-Ālūsī, vol. 1, p. 537-38.

Al-Ālūsī added, however, that one of the verifiers (*muḥaqqiqūn*) goes as far as to say that if some falsehood is related from the Jews it does not matter that the narrative chain is authentic.⁴²⁷ According to al-Ālūsī, what that verifier was concerned about was the objectionable content of the narratives; and what al-Suyūṭī proved was the authenticity of the chains of authorities behind the narratives.⁴²⁸

But al-Ālūsī has a way of accepting al-Suyūṭī's proof and yet not subscribe to the objectionable content of the narratives. His solution to this dilemma is to presume the authenticity of the reports and to interpret the story along the lines of *tafsīr bi-l-ishārah* (exegesis by way of allusion). He suggests that the verse should be explained by way of indications and signs (*bi-l-rumūz wa-l-ishārah*). This is a method of exegesis that is largely rejected by the mainstream of Qur'ānic exegesis. But al-Ālūsī resorts to that method here, offering a variety of allegorical explanations for the story of the fallen angels. For example, he writes that the two angels may be pointers to two types of intellect both of which belong to the world of holiness. In this sort of exegesis, the woman named *al-zuharah* would in fact be the speaking soul (*al-naḥs al-nāṭiqah*). The angels' propositioning Venus would signify their teaching her, and so forth. Such is al-

⁴²⁷ Al-Ālūsī, vol. 1, p. 538. The principle of *hadīth* criticism enunciated above is here at work: if the text of a *hadīth* is deemed on rational grounds to be false, the best of chains cannot sustain it. Of course that applies whether the narrative originates from Muslims or others. The converse of the principle is that the proof of the soundness of the chain does not constitute a proof of the reasonableness of the text. Al-Suyūṭī had proved the authenticity of the chain, but that strictly means that the persons in the chain are known to be connected in a continuous chronological sequence, and that they are severally trusted as *hadīth* transmitters. These features of a chain of narrators, however, do not rule out the possibility of human error. The application of the rational principle of evaluating the text of a tradition would involve crediting an unreasonable text to such error. Those who oppose the application of this principle, however, are afraid lest its use throws into doubt the reliability of the whole system of transmission once it is admitted that traditions with trusted chains contain errors. Jonathan Brown, "How We Know Early *Ḥadīth* Critics Did *Matn* Criticism and Why it is So Hard to Find" in *The Ḥadīth: Critical Concepts in Islamic Studies* ed. Mustafa Shah, vol. 3, pp. 179-212.

⁴²⁸ Al-Ālūsī, vol. 1, p. 538.

Ālūsī's attempt to escape through the horns of the dilemma. Being forced to choose between denial of the chain of narrators and denial of the content of the narrative, he accepts them both, but gives the content of the narrative an allegorical interpretation. He writes, "Whoever holds to the authenticity of the narratives of this story, and takes it in its literal sense has gone to extremes and committed error."⁴²⁹ In sum, al-Ālūsī was convinced by al-Suyūṭī's demonstration of the authenticity of the traditions. Yet he could not believe the story contained therein.

Al-Dhahabī is appalled at al-Ālūsī's approach.⁴³⁰ To al-Dhahabī, al-Ālūsī was swayed by al-Suyūṭī's analysis of the traditions. He suggests that al-Ālūsī should have been guided by his own intellectual objections to the fable, and should have followed those scholars whom al-Ālūsī himself cited as having denounced the legend.⁴³¹ My point here is not to decide the truth of the story, or the authenticity of its transmission, but merely to show that al-Ālūsī's exegesis has been influenced by the work of al-Suyūṭī. Hence the latter's attempt to give the exegetical legends new life has not been in vain.

As for al-Shawkānī (d. 1250/1834), he has openly acknowledged that he will include traditions from al-Suyūṭī.⁴³² In his discussion on Hārūt and Mārūt he mentions that there are many traditions that support the story, and that al-Suyūṭī has given an exhaustive account of them in *al-Durr*.⁴³³ Then he adds the summary conclusion which

⁴²⁹ Al-Ālūsī, vol. 1, p. 538.

⁴³⁰ Al-Dhahabī, *al-Isrā'īliyyāt*, vol. 3, p. 94.

⁴³¹ Al-Dhahabī, *al-Isrā'īliyyāt*, vol. 3, p. 94.

⁴³² Muḥammad b. Ali b. Muḥammad Al-Shawkānī, *Fath al-Qadīr: Al-Jam' bayna al-fanny-l-riwāya wa-l-dirāya min 'ilm al-tafsīr* (Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazm, 2000) combined single vol., p. 36.

⁴³³ Al-Shawkānī, p. 124.

was given by Ibn Kathīr, as we had seen above, castigating these traditions as *isrā'īliyyāt*.⁴³⁴

Had he ended the discussion there, al-Shawkānī would have left the impression that he was satisfied with Ibn Kathīr's conclusion. However, as we will now see, al-Shawkānī accepts the validity of the story. He moves on to cite the view of al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1272) to which he then responds. Al-Qurṭubī argued that the traditions depicting the fall of the angels are all false since they are contrary to basic principles of the faith, especially the principle that angels are infallible.⁴³⁵ Once al-Qurṭubī had decided against the tale, he needed to get around the plain Qur'ānic statement that the angels taught magic. To accomplish this, al-Qurṭubī resorted to the principle of *taqdīm wa ta'khīr* (advancing and retracting) the words within the verse.⁴³⁶

Al-Shawkānī responds by saying that al-Qurṭubī's rejection of the story is based on pure presupposition. Al-Shawkānī adds that the mighty book has mentioned the story, even if in a summary form; therefore there is no use in applying convoluted readings to avoid that fact.⁴³⁷ According to al-Shawkānī, the general principle that angels are infallible does not rule out the exception. To prove that such an exception is possible, al-Shawkānī mentions the example of Iblīs (Diabolis). Iblīs used to have a great status. Yet

⁴³⁴ Al-Shawkānī, p. 124.

⁴³⁵ Al-Shawkānī, p. 124.

⁴³⁶ Al-Shawkānī, p. 124.

⁴³⁷ On the Qur'ān's reference to stories already in circulation see Alan Dundes, *Fables of the Ancients? Folklore in the Qur'ān* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

Iblīs became the worst of creatures and the most notorious disbeliever. Thus al-Shawkānī argues that Hārūt and Mārūt can be exceptions to the general principle.⁴³⁸

Hence it is clear that al-Shawkānī accepts neither Ibn Kathīr's nor al-Qurṭubī's summary dismissal of the legend. Al-Shawkānī's acceptance of the story has, no doubt, been aided by the exhaustive presentation of the traditions which he reproduced from *al-Durr*. Hence al-Suyūṭī was successful in drawing renewed attention to the legend after Ibn Kathīr had attempted to discard it from the exegetical stream.

3.8 Summary

The *tafsīrs* of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr have often been presented as models of the tradition-based genre. In what way is al-Suyūṭī's *al-Durr* different from these? Through a careful synoptic reading of the three *tafsīrs*, we have seen that al-Suyūṭī has given renewed emphasis to legendary material that had been a part of early tradition-based exegesis. Al-Ṭabarī included a large share of such material. But Ibn Taymīyah insisted on limiting the use of legends in exegesis. Influenced by Ibn Taymīyah, Ibn Kathīr recounted the traditions only to scrutinize them and to reject the tales which he unfairly dubs as *isrā'īlīyāt*. In contrast with Ibn Kathīr, al-Suyūṭī sought through *al-Durr* to bring the legends back into focus, even superseding al-Ṭabarī in this regard. Al-Suyūṭī has largely reproduced the traditions from these other two *tafsīrs*, and added more of the lore from other sources. In this way al-Suyūṭī has enriched the exegetical stream with neglected, new, and more interesting content. Those who suggest, therefore, that *al-Durr* should be shorn of such fables have missed the point: its inclusion of those tales not only

⁴³⁸ Al-Shawkānī, p. 124.

makes its reading entertaining, but also represents one of its salient features and authorial objectives. Despite the influence of Ibn Taymīyah’s radical hermeneutics, al-Suyūṭī’s efforts were not in vain. We have seen, with reference to Qur’ān 2:102 on the story of Hārūt and Mārūt, that two prominent subsequent *tafsīrs*, those of al-Ālūsī and al-Shawkānī, were each in their own way influenced by al-Suyūṭī’s work. Al-Suyūṭī had listed the numerous narratives from disparate sources and early authorities who believed in the story of the seduction of these two angels. He thus made it difficult for subsequent exegetes to dispel the myth on the basis of the developed *ḥadīth* sciences.

Chapter 4

Reclaiming Wisdom Traditions

4.1 Introduction

In the present chapter, we will see that al-Suyūṭī attributes a lengthy list of wisdom sayings to each of Jesus, Solomon, and the extra-biblical Luqmān.⁴³⁹ This is a surprising development in Qur'ānic exegesis. Prior to al-Suyūṭī, such wisdom sayings had been generally ignored by the mainstream *tafsīr* tradition. As I will demonstrate, the three lists of sayings which al-Suyūṭī has accumulated in *al-Durr al-manthūr* are largely absent from the *tafsīrs* of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr. However, al-Suyūṭī attempted to give wisdom a voice once again. He consulted many early Muslim sources and collected from them the proverbs and witticisms of Luqmān, Solomon (Sulaymān), and Jesus (ʿĪsā).

Prior to al-Suyūṭī, Muslim scholars had relegated to non-religious writings such pre-Qur'ānic snippets of wisdom that were not repeated either in the Qur'ān or in Muḥammad's speeches. The inclusion of wisdom traditions in *al-Durr* thus marks al-Suyūṭī's bold attempt to reclaim such material for tradition-based *tafsīr*.

As Dmitri Gutas explained,

[W]isdom literature, with its emphasis on the eloquent formulation of the authority of the ancients as a guide to proper personal and social conduct, was

⁴³⁹ On Luqmān, see A. H. M. Zahniser, "Luqmān," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2003) vol. 3, pp. 242-243 in *Gale Virtual Reference Library*, accessed Oct. 1, 2011.

relegated to the domain of *adab*, both in its wider sense of mores and the restricted one of literature.⁴⁴⁰

As I will show below, the Qur'ān repeatedly speaks of wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*) as a guide to proper behaviour. As Gutas explained, both Arab and non-Arab authorities have been, for the most part, consistent in defining *al-ḥikmah* as 'wisdom'.⁴⁴¹ Gutas argued for a new but tentative suggestion that the term rather means 'wisdom sayings' or maxims.⁴⁴² In the present study, it will not be necessary to judge the validity of Gutas' suggestion. Rather, as far as possible in the ensuing discussion, I will retain the word *al-ḥikmah* in the Arabic to avoid prejudging its meaning.

As we explore the *tafsīr* works below, we will see that the exegetes had to choose from various possible meanings of *al-ḥikmah*. Al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr generally chose to explain *al-ḥikmah* as the *sunnah*, the practice of Muḥammad. But al-Suyūṭī reversed that trend. While al-Suyūṭī agrees that the practice of Muḥammad is an essential basis of proper Muslim conduct, he nevertheless sees wisdom as an additional guide. Hence, at appropriate occurrences of the word *al-ḥikmah* in the Qur'ān, al-Suyūṭī seized the opportunity to present the wisdom sayings of Luqmān, Solomon, and Jesus.

Tradition-based *tafsīr* positions Muḥammad as the Qur'ān's primary exegete. This understanding of Muḥammad's role in elucidating the Qur'ān is based on the belief that the Qur'ān and its explanation were both revealed to him. That belief was articulated in

⁴⁴⁰ Dmitri Gutas, "Classical Arabic Wisdom Literature: Nature and Scope," in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 101, no. 1, (Jan-Mar, 1981) pp. 49-86.

⁴⁴¹ Gutas, p. 50. See also Bernd Radtke, "Wisdom," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, vol. 5, pp. 483-484; A. M. Goichon, "Ḥikma," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman et al (Leiden: Brill, 2011) Brill Online, accessed October 3, 2011.

⁴⁴² Gutas, p. 50.

its initial stage by al-Ṭabarī in the introduction to his exegesis.⁴⁴³ Ibn Taymīyah, in his *Muqaddimah*, gave that belief a more complete exposition and renewed emphasis. Ibn Taymīyah argued that Muḥammad received two revelations: the recited Qur’ān; and the unrecited *sunnah* which is now preserved in *ḥadīth* texts.⁴⁴⁴

The conviction that the *sunnah* was revealed along with the Qur’ān owes much to the pioneering argument of al-Shafī’ī.⁴⁴⁵ In his *al-Risālah* he wanted to present as many Qur’ānic proof texts as possible to support the notion that Muslims are obligated to follow Muḥammad’s *sunnah*.⁴⁴⁶ He noticed several verses which indicate that God revealed to Muḥammad the Scripture and *al-ḥikmah*. Al-Shafī’ī could think of no extra-Qur’ānic revelation to Muḥammad other than the *sunnah*. Hence he equated the Qur’ān’s reference to *al-ḥikmah* with the *sunnah*.⁴⁴⁷

As I will demonstrate, al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Suyūṭī had no difficulty in adopting al-Shafī’ī’s equation of *al-ḥikmah* with the *sunnah* in those verses which refer to Muḥammad.⁴⁴⁸ But the exegetes were unable to maintain the same meaning in those verses in which *al-ḥikmah* was said to have been vouchsafed to Luqmān, David,

⁴⁴³ Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi al-bayān ‘an ta’wīl āy al-Qur’ān: Tafṣīr al-Ṭabarī* (Beirut: Iḥya al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 2001) vol. 26, pp. 38-39 and 45-46.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibn Taymīyah, *Muqaddimah fī uṣūl al-tafṣīr* in Musā‘id b. Solomon b. Nāṣir al-Ṭayyār, *Sharḥ Muqaddimah fī uṣūl al-tafṣīr li-bn Taymīyah* (Damam: Dār Ibn al-Jawzī, 2007-8) p. 253.

⁴⁴⁵ N. J. Coulson, *A History of Islamic Law* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1964) p. 56; Wael B. Hallaq, *A History of Islamic Legal Theories: An introduction to Sunnī uṣūl al-fiqh* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) p. 18; Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950) p. 16.

⁴⁴⁶ Al-Shafī’ī, *al-Risāla: fī uṣūl al-fiqh*, trans. Majid Khadduri (Oxford: Islamic Texts Society, 1987).

⁴⁴⁷ Al-Shafī’ī, p. 111.

⁴⁴⁸ See, for example, the three commentaries in their exegeses of Qur’ān 2:129.

Solomon, and Jesus.⁴⁴⁹ Al-Ṭabarī traded on ambiguity, attempting as far as possible to let wisdom mean prophethood, or the *sunnah* of Muḥammad, or the *sunnah* of the previous prophets. Ibn Kathīr largely followed this strategy, but his resistance to wisdom was eventually worn down as he was confronted with Qur’ānic passages wherein *sunnah* does not fit the context. The pressure against him mounted until he came to discuss the wisdom of Luqmān, at which point he gained relief by presenting a short list of five of the sage’s sayings. But, as if to atone for a lapse, Ibn Kathīr immediately added five pages of sayings of Muḥammad and his early followers dealing with subjects similar to those of Luqmān’s sayings. The result is that Luqmān’s sayings are eclipsed by those of Muḥammad and early Muslims.

On the other hand, al-Suyūṭī attributed to Luqmān a list of aphorisms several times longer than that given by Ibn Kathīr. Al-Suyūṭī has not only included the five sayings from Ibn Kathīr, but also added another fifty-two. Moreover, al-Suyūṭī’s allowance for *al-ḥikmah* to mean wisdom is seen in his extensive exegesis of Qur’ān 2:269 which reads: “God gives wisdom to whoever He will. Whoever is given wisdom has truly been given much good, but only those with insight bear this in mind.”⁴⁵⁰ In that verse, God’s gift of wisdom is not restricted to prophetic recipients. Rather, the verse’s wording is general enough for wisdom to be a bounty bestowed on persons beyond the prophets and sages mentioned in the Qur’ān. In his commentary on Qur’ān 2:269, al-Suyūṭī revealed his interest in wisdom sayings by mentioning a maxim of Luqmān. I

⁴⁴⁹ For example, Qur’ān 3:48, 21:79 and 31:12.

⁴⁵⁰ Qur’ān 2:269, trans. Abdel Haleem, p. 31.

could find no *tafsīr* prior to *al-Durr* mentioning a maxim of Luqmān in connection with this verse.

As we will see, al-Suyūṭī's emphasis on wisdom as the meaning of *al-ḥikmah* has influenced some subsequent exegetical works. For example, al-Ālūsī, in his exegesis of Qur'ān 2:269, copied the maxim of Luqmān which he found mentioned in al-Suyūṭī's exegesis of the same verse.⁴⁵¹ Likewise, in his exegesis of Qur'ān 31:12, al-Ālūsī copied thirteen of Luqmān's sayings which al-Suyūṭī had presented at the comparable location in *al-Durr*. Subsequently, the exegete Ibn 'Āshūr copied into his exegesis the thirteen of Luqmān's sayings which he found in al-Ālūsī's exegesis. He then added several other sayings of Luqmān drawn from other sources.⁴⁵² Hence Ibn 'Āshūr was influenced by al-Ālūsī who in turn was influenced by al-Suyūṭī. In this way, al-Suyūṭī has succeeded in bringing the wisdom sayings of Luqmān from the periphery of religious literature into the mainstream *tafsīr* tradition.

4.2 The Struggle to Redefine *Ḥikmah*

The Qur'ān mentions the word *al-ḥikmah* on twenty occasions. The exegetes tended to explain the term at its first mention, and then to refer their readers back to the explanation already given. The exegetes may also summarize their previous explanation or amend it at new locations in their *tafsīrs*. The first occurrence of the word *al-ḥikmah* is

⁴⁵¹ Al-Ālūsī, *Rūh al-Ma'ānī fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'aẓīm wa-l-sab' al-mathānī* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2003) vol. 3, p. 51; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, p. 295. The saying of Luqmān is as follows: "My son, you must sit in the company of the *ulamā'* and listen to the words (*kalām*) of the wise (*ḥukamā'*), for certainly God revives the dead heart with the light of *al-ḥikmah* as he revives the dead earth with a downpour of rain."

⁴⁵² See Ibn 'Āshūr, *Tafsīr al-tahrīr wa-l-tanwīr* (Tunis: Dar Saḥnūn, 1997) vol. 21, p. 169 in *al-Marjī'* flash disk.

at Qur’ān 2:129, which reads: “Our Lord, make a messenger of their own rise up from among them, to recite Your revelations to them, teach them the Scripture and wisdom, and purify them.”⁴⁵³ That verse gives the words of prayer which Abraham and Ishmael uttered after they laid the foundations of the *ka’bah* (the Meccan sanctuary). They thus beseeched God to raise a prophet from among the people in the environs of the *ka’bah*.

Seeing Muḥammad as the answer to that prayer, the exegetes generally understand his functions to include the teaching of both the Scripture and *al-ḥikmah*. In his exegesis of Qur’ān 2:129, al-Ṭabarī presents a variety of suggestions given by previous exegetes as the possible meanings of *al-ḥikmah*. Then al-Ṭabarī offers his conclusion which he declares to be *al-ṣawāb min al-qawl* (the correct thing to say). His conclusion is that *al-ḥikmah* means “the knowledge of the commands of God which could not be known except by way of the exposition given via the Messenger.”⁴⁵⁴ Tracing the etymology of the word, al-Ṭabarī explains that *ḥikmah* is derived from *ḥukm*, which means the judgement between truth and falsehood. He adds that the *ḥakīm* is the person who clarifies the *ḥikmah*, meaning that he clarifies the correctness of speech and action.⁴⁵⁵ Al-Ṭabarī then restates the verse, with its expressions expanded, to mean that Muḥammad will not only teach the revealed scripture but will also delineate God’s judgements and commands which God will teach him.⁴⁵⁶ Therefore, according to al-

⁴⁵³ Qur’ān 2:129, trans. Abdel Haleem, p. 15.

⁴⁵⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 1, p. 645.

⁴⁵⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 1, p. 645. Al-Ṭabarī explains further that *ḥikmah* is to *ḥukm* as *jilsah* (a specific sort of sitting) is to *julūs* (sitting), and as *qi’dah* (a specific sort of sitting) is to *qu’ūd* (sitting). See Gutas, p. 53.

⁴⁵⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 1, p. 645.

Ṭabarī, the complete guidance for Muslims is contained in the revelation given to Muḥammad. Moreover, according to al-Ṭabarī, the divine revelations which Muḥammad received included both the Qur’ān and extra-Qur’ānic explanations of God’s commands and injunctions.

Ibn Kathīr’s exegesis is more explicit: “*Al-ḥikmah* means the *sunnah*.”⁴⁵⁷ He mentions several early authorities who held this view. Then he adds that it is also said that *al-ḥikmah* means *al-fahm fī-l-dīn* (the understanding of the religion).⁴⁵⁸ By keeping the holder of that opinion anonymous, Ibn Kathīr subtly indicates that he regards the opinion as being of secondary importance. Nonetheless, Ibn Kathīr tries to accommodate both opinions: *al-ḥikmah* means the *sunnah*; and *al-ḥikmah* means the understanding of the religion. Ibn Kathīr assures his readers that the two opinions are not mutually contradictory.⁴⁵⁹ However, before leaving the matter to rest, Ibn Kathīr adds a third statement: “[Muḥammad] will teach [people] the Scripture and *al-ḥikmah*” means the following:

He will teach them the good that they ought to do, and the evil that they should guard against. He will also inform them that God will be pleased with them if they obey him. In this way they will increase their obedience, and they will avoid such disobedience as would displease God.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁷ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 416.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 416.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 416.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 416.

Hence Ibn Kathīr has left no religious teaching for Muslims to learn aside from those for which Muḥammad served as a conduit. At this point, al-Suyūṭī concurs that *al-ḥikmah* means the *sunnah*.⁴⁶¹

Al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr continue along similar lines in their exegesis of *al-ḥikmah* in reference to Qur’ān 2:151. The verse reads, “We have sent among you a Messenger of your own to recite Our revelations to you and purify you and teach you the Scripture, wisdom, and [other] things you did not know.”⁴⁶² Al-Ṭabarī writes that, by *al-ḥikmah* God means “the *sunan* and *al-fiqh fī-l-dīn* (the understanding of the religion).⁴⁶³ As can be seen from that citation, al-Ṭabarī employs the term *sunnah* in the plural form: *sunan*. He therefore thinks of the *sunnah* not simply as a general understanding of Muḥammad’s way of life, but as a conglomerate of the many minute acts of Muḥammad. It is the same plural term by which a whole genre of *ḥadīth* compilations is designated: the *sunan* works.⁴⁶⁴

In his exegesis of Qur’ān 2:151, Ibn Kathīr makes a statement which leaves little hope that he would be interested in the wisdom sayings of pre-Islamic times. He contrasts the blessed situation of the Muslims under Muḥammad’s guidance with the situation prior to that, the time of ignorance, when baseless sayings served as guide.⁴⁶⁵ At the comparable location in *al-Durr*, al-Suyūṭī does not register a difference with his

⁴⁶¹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol.1, p. 718.

⁴⁶² Qur’ān 2:151, trans. Abdel Haleem, p. 17, brackets original.

⁴⁶³ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 2, p. 46.

⁴⁶⁴ See Jonathan Brown, *Ḥadīth: Muhammad’s Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (New York: Oneworld, 2009) p. 31.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 433.

predecessors, for he passes over the relevant part of Qur’ān 2:151 without appending any comment or tradition.⁴⁶⁶

Al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr similarly summarize or repeat their explanations of *al-ḥikmah* in reference to Qur’ān 2:231 wherein the blessings of God are again said to include the revealed Scripture and *al-ḥikmah*. But here both al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr summarize the meaning of *al-ḥikmah* as the *sunnah*. They do not mention here that *al-ḥikmah* can mean the understanding of the religion.⁴⁶⁷ Again, al-Suyūṭī is silent, saving his ink for the wisdom sayings he will soon present.⁴⁶⁸

However, at Qur’ān 2:251 the three *tafsīrs* are finally forced to acknowledge that *al-ḥikmah* has to mean much more than the *sunnah* of Muḥammad. The relevant part of the verse reads, “David killed Goliath, and God gave him sovereignty and wisdom and taught him what He pleased.”⁴⁶⁹ David (Dāwūd) is now the recipient of the divine gift of *al-ḥikmah*. The exegetes concur that the *ḥikmah* which David received is *al-nubūwwah* (the prophethood).⁴⁷⁰

But even that definition receives considerable modification at Qur’ān 2:269. As mentioned above, this is a key verse serving as the basis for al-Suyūṭī’s redefinition of *al-ḥikmah*. Again, the verse reads, “God gives wisdom to whoever He will. Whoever is given wisdom has truly been given much good, but only those with insight bear this in

⁴⁶⁶ See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 2, p. 37.

⁴⁶⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 2, p. 579; Ibn Kathīr, vol. 2, p. 581.

⁴⁶⁸ For al-Suyūṭī’s silence on *al-ḥikmah* at Qur’ān 2:31, see, *al-Durr*, vol. 2, p. 704.

⁴⁶⁹ Qur’ān 2:251, trans. Abdel Haleem, p. 29.

⁴⁷⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 2, p. 754; Ibn Kathīr, vol. 2, p. 615; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, p. 153.

mind.”⁴⁷¹ The wording of this verse demands that *al-ḥikmah* not be restricted to prophets. Hence al-Ṭabarī rephrases the verse: “[God] grants the correctness of speech and action to whomever of his servants he wishes.”⁴⁷² Al-Ṭabarī’s statement thus equates *al-ḥikmah* with “correctness of speech and action.” But the present verse forces al-Ṭabarī to analyze once more the various possible meanings of *al-ḥikmah*. The traditions he supplies support the various meanings of *al-ḥikmah* as ‘the Qur’ān and its understanding,’ ‘knowledge of the religion,’ ‘understanding,’ ‘fear of God,’ and ‘prophethood.’⁴⁷³ Al-Ṭabarī also includes a tradition according to which the meaning of *al-ḥikmah* is *al-’aql* (intelligence). But he subsumed this tradition under the meaning of ‘knowledge of the religion.’⁴⁷⁴ As is his usual procedure, in his final analysis al-Ṭabarī attempts to accommodate as many meanings as he could justify on grammatical grounds. Hence he writes that all of the above exegeses are acceptable. Significantly, he now concedes that ‘prophethood’ is only a part of the meaning of *al-ḥikmah*.⁴⁷⁵

Ibn Kathīr included in his exegesis of Qur’ān 2:269 only eight of al-Ṭabarī’s fifteen traditions. Nonetheless, Ibn Kathīr’s discussion of the verse is equally comprehensive. Moreover, he replaces one of al-Ṭabarī’s traditions with two of his own that better mirror a common proverb and biblical statement. Al-Ṭabarī’s tradition reads,

⁴⁷¹ Qur’ān 2:269, trans. Abdel Haleem, p. 31.

⁴⁷² Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 3, p. 107.

⁴⁷³ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 3, pp. 107-109.

⁴⁷⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 3, p. 109.

⁴⁷⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 3, p. 109.

“*Ra’s kull shay khashyat Allah* (the beginning of everything is the fear of God).”⁴⁷⁶ By way of comparison, one of Ibn Kathīr’s two traditions reads, “*Ra’s al-ḥikmah makhāfat Allah* (the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom).”⁴⁷⁷ Moreover, Ibn Kathīr adds two traditions with important implications. The first tradition states, “*Al-ḥikmah is al-sunnah.*” Hence Ibn Kathīr has not relinquished that view of *al-ḥikmah*. The second tradition added here by Ibn Kathīr supports esoteric knowledge. According to that tradition, Mālik says, “It has occurred to my mind (*qalb*) that *al-ḥikmah* is the understanding of the religion of God, and it is a matter that God inserts into the hearts.”⁴⁷⁸

However, Ibn Kathīr concludes that discussion by expressing his agreement with the view of the majority of scholars. According to Ibn Kathīr, the view of the majority of scholars is that *al-ḥikmah* is not exclusive to prophets but is found among people more generally. However, the highest form of *al-ḥikmah* is that of the prophets and, even more so, that of the messengers. Nonetheless, the followers of the prophets will receive a share of *al-ḥikmah* by virtue of following the prophets.⁴⁷⁹ Thus, according to Ibn Kathīr, *al-ḥikmah* is closely connected to the revelation given to prophets and messengers; and it is by following these personages that other people acquire a share of *al-ḥikmah*. Obviously,

⁴⁷⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 3, p. 109

⁴⁷⁷ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 2, p. 643. Cf. Proverbs 9:10, “The beginning of wisdom is fear of the Lord, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding,” and Psalm 111:10, “The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord; all who practice it gain sound understanding.” *The Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995) pp. 1299 and 1244.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 2, p. 643.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 2, p. 643.

Ibn Kathīr is here only a short step away from asserting that, for the followers of Muḥammad, *al-ḥikmah* is the *sunnah*.

To explain the reference to *al-ḥikmah* in Qur’ān 2:269, al-Suyūṭī presented fifty eight traditions in comparison with al-Ṭabarī’s fifteen and Ibn Kathīr’s twelve. The sheer number of al-Suyūṭī’s traditions immediately reveals his keen interest in the Qur’ān’s praise of *al-ḥikmah*. Al-Suyūṭī’s traditions support a wide variety of meanings of *al-ḥikmah*. But it is significant that none of these numerous traditions mentions the *sunnah* as a possible meaning of *al-ḥikmah*. Moreover, al-Suyūṭī clearly embraces esoteric knowledge. In this regard, al-Suyūṭī presents a *ḥadīth* in which Muḥammad says, “If God intends betterment for his servant, God causes him to understand the religion and *alhamahu rushdah* (guides him by inspiration).”⁴⁸⁰

Some of al-Suyūṭī’s traditions are novel. Such is the saying which al-Suyūṭī attributes to Muḥammad, “Gentleness (*al-rifq*) is the beginning of wisdom.”⁴⁸¹ Some of al-Suyūṭī’s traditions buttress important points. For example, as was seen above, both al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr relate a tradition saying that *al-ḥikmah* equals *al-’aql* (intelligence). But they each relate that tradition on the authority of a certain Ibn Zayd. However, al-Suyūṭī states a tradition that similarly promotes intelligence as the meaning of *al-ḥikmah*. But al-Suyūṭī’s tradition is backed by the authority of Muḥammad himself. Thus, according to al-Suyūṭī’s *ḥadīth*, the prophet says that a person’s religion is not set right until his *’aql* is set right.⁴⁸²

⁴⁸⁰ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, p. 296.

⁴⁸¹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, p. 290.

⁴⁸² Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, p. 297.

Several of al-Suyūṭī’s traditions speak of the importance of gaining knowledge without restricting such knowledge to knowledge of the religion.⁴⁸³ One such *ḥadīth* praises the acquisition of knowledge for its own sake—even knowledge that will not be put into action. According to that *ḥadīth*, learning a chapter of such knowledge is better than offering a thousand cycles of prayer.⁴⁸⁴

Al-Suyūṭī’s *ḥadīths* speak of knowledge in such a general manner that al-Ālūsī was apprehensive that those *ḥadīths* would be misunderstood. Therefore, when al-Ālūsī copied some of these *ḥadīths* into his exegesis, he added his own statement serving to limit knowledge to that which Muḥammad taught. To al-Ālūsī, the knowledge spoken of in these *ḥadīths* is “that lawful (*shar’ī*) knowledge which was brought by the wise one of the prophets and the prophet of the wise ones—the honourable seal of the prophets.”⁴⁸⁵

Some of al-Suyūṭī’s traditions praise *al-ḥikmah* to a degree not seen in the *tafsīrs* of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr. Here Muḥammad says, “A word of wisdom is the lost property of the believer; therefore the believer should reclaim wisdom wherever he finds it.”⁴⁸⁶ Moreover, Muḥammad says, “If anyone is devoted to God for forty days, the springs of wisdom will burst forth from his heart unto his tongue.”⁴⁸⁷

It is even more significant that al-Suyūṭī presents a wisdom saying of Luqmān to illustrate the wisdom which is praised in the present verse, Qur’ān 2:269. The saying

⁴⁸³ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, p. 297-99.

⁴⁸⁴ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, p. 297-98.

⁴⁸⁵ Al-Ālūsī, vol. 3, p. 51.

⁴⁸⁶ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, p. 295.

⁴⁸⁷ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, p. 295.

reads: “My son, you must sit in the company of the *ulamā*’ and listen to the words (*kalām*) of the wise (*ḥukamā*’), for certainly God revives the dead heart with the light of *al-ḥikmah* as he revives the dead earth with a downpour of rain.”⁴⁸⁸ I could find no *tafsīr* prior to *al-Durr* containing this or any other saying of Luqmān in reference to Qur’ān 2:269. Here al-Suyūfī introduced the saying into the exegetical stream only to have it copied later by al-Ālūsī in the latter’s exegesis.⁴⁸⁹ Al-Ālūsī at this point does not indicate his dependence on al-Suyūfī, but elsewhere in his exegesis he does acknowledge his use of *al-Durr*. For example, in his commentary on Qur’ān 5:67, al-Ālūsī prefaced a *ḥadīth* by saying, “And al-Jalāl al-Suyūfī compiled it in his *al-Durr al-manthūr*.”⁴⁹⁰

In sum, we have seen that the exegetes had to address the fact that Qur’ān 2:269 speaks about *al-ḥikmah* being granted to people generally. Al-Ṭabarī had to drop his previous insistence that *al-ḥikmah* means the *sunnah*. He had to likewise modify his previous definition that *ḥikmah* means prophethood. He now concedes that prophethood is a subdivision of *al-ḥikmah*. Ibn Kathīr, for his part, mentions a tradition in which *al-ḥikmah* equals the *sunnah*. Then, in his summary, he insists that people other than prophets obtain a share of *al-ḥikmah* by following the prophets. For his part, al-Suyūfī drops all mention of *sunnah* in reference to Qur’ān 2:269. Though he repeats the traditions equating *al-ḥikmah* with prophethood, these traditions are subsumed within a larger body of traditions some of which treat *al-ḥikmah* as wisdom. One of these traditions goes as far as to report a wisdom saying of Luqmān. It is thus clear that after

⁴⁸⁸ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, p. 295.

⁴⁸⁹ See al-Ālūsī, vol. 3, p. 51.

⁴⁹⁰ Al-Ālūsī, vol. 6, p. 991 in *al-Marjī*’ flash disk.

Ibn Kathīr attempted to deemphasize wisdom al-Suyūṭī aimed to reemphasize wisdom as an essential aspect of the meaning of *al-ḥikmah*.

Al-Suyūṭī's departure from his predecessors is seen more clearly in the exegesis of the annunciation to Mary that God will teach Jesus *al-ḥikmah*.⁴⁹¹ At this juncture al-Ṭabarī writes of *al-ḥikmah*: "It is the *sunnah* which [God] will reveal to [Jesus], but not in a book."⁴⁹² Ibn Kathīr skirts the issue: "As for *al-ḥikmah*, the discussion of its *tafsīr* has preceded in Sūrat al-Baqarah."⁴⁹³ That is all he says here about *al-ḥikmah*. Hence he sends his readers chasing after his varying exegesis of the word *al-ḥikmah* at the five locations where it is mentioned in the Qur'ān's second chapter.⁴⁹⁴ It is clear that the present context dissuades Ibn Kathīr from offering his often short explanation that *al-ḥikmah* equals *sunnah*. On the other hand, rather than being faced with a difficulty, al-Suyūṭī sees new opportunity at the present verse. Rather than offer a strict definition of *al-ḥikmah* here, al-Suyūṭī proffers one hundred and four traditions containing wisdom sayings of Jesus. He even highlights the importance of these traditions by placing them under a sectional heading: "A mention of snippets of the wisdom (*ḥikam*) of Jesus on whom be peace."⁴⁹⁵ There are only three places in *al-Durr* where al-Suyūṭī breaks the

⁴⁹¹ Qur'ān 3:48.

⁴⁹² Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 3, p. 321.

⁴⁹³ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 2, p. 709.

⁴⁹⁴ Qur'ān 2:129, 151, 231, 251 and 269.

⁴⁹⁵ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, p. 48. That caption was previously used by al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1153 or later) in his exegesis *Majma' al-Bayān* to introduce the wisdom sayings of Luqmān at Qur'ān 31:12. See <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=4&tTafsirNo=3&tSoraNo=31&tAyahNo=12&tDisplay=yes&Page=4&Size=1&LanguageId=1> accessed Oct. 11, 2011. I could find no other *tafsīr* employing this unique phrase except those of al-Ṭabrisī and al-Suyūṭī. Al-Suyūṭī wrote at Qur'ān 3:48, "*Dhikr nubadh min ḥikam 'Īsā*," whereas al-Ṭabrisī wrote at Qur'ān 31:12, "*Dhikr nubadh min ḥikam Luqmān*." It is therefore obvious that al-Suyūṭī made use of al-Ṭabrisī's exegesis. Al-Suyūṭī apparently saw the caption at the one

commentary of a *sūrah* with a sectional heading. Al-Suyūṭī's special interest in the other two sections is clear.⁴⁹⁶ Likewise here, the unusual caption is an indication of al-Suyūṭī's special interest in the wisdom sayings of Jesus. We shall look at Jesus' wisdom sayings in my next chapter where I discuss additional implications of al-Suyūṭī's unique interest in Jesus. Here it suffices to see that al-Suyūṭī has dared to steer the meaning of *al-ḥikmah* towards 'wisdom sayings.'

4.3 The Wisdom of Solomon

I now turn to al-Suyūṭī's portrayal of the wisdom of Solomon. As the *Oxford Companion to the Bible* states, Solomon "has come down in the tradition as the wise man par excellence."⁴⁹⁷ Several works related to wisdom within the Hebrew Scriptures are attributed to Solomon.⁴⁹⁸ But little of this literature found its way into the *tafsīr* works. As Saleh has shown, al-Biqā'ī generally took the trouble to copy relevant sections of the Bible into his exegesis. Thus he included many of the Psalms and many citations from

location and decided to use it at the other location with the name of Jesus appropriately substituted for that of Luqmān. Al-Ṭabrisī did not, however, mention the wisdom sayings of Jesus. As for the wisdom sayings of Luqmān, it does not appear that al-Suyūṭī derived them from al-Ṭabrisī. Al-Ṭabrisī's *tafsīr* contains traditions not copied by al-Suyūṭī. The fact that al-Suyūṭī has consulted a Shi'ī *tafsīr* is interesting. I will return to a discussion of the sectarian and political aspects of *al-Durr* in Chapter 6 of the present study.

⁴⁹⁶ The first instance is at Qur'ān 2:79 where he deals with the question of earning from the sale of Scripture (see *al-Durr*, vol. 1, p. 444). Since his works contain a good deal of scriptural material, and he is known to have profited from the sale of his books, the question obviously troubled him. The other instance is at the end of his exegesis of Qur'ān 4:12 where inheritance laws are discussed (see *al-Durr*, vol. 4, p. 261). It was a sore point with him that his admission of his middling knowledge of the topic, and his ineptitude with arithmetic, had become an excuse for his detractors to question his intelligence in general. With that caption, and the accompanying traditions, he demonstrates his keen interest in the subject of inheritance.

⁴⁹⁷ Roland E. Murphy, O. Carm., "Solomon," in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. Bruce Metzger et al (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) p. 707. See also Abramsky, Samuel, et al, "Solomon." *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd edition, vol. 18, (Detroit: Macmillan, 2007) 755-763 in *Gale Virtual Reference Library*, accessed Oct. 1, 2011.

⁴⁹⁸ The works attributed to Solomon include Proverbs, the Song of Solomon, and Ecclesiastes.

Jeremiah.⁴⁹⁹ But he afforded his readers nothing of the biblical wisdom of Solomon.⁵⁰⁰

As for the genre of stories of the prophets, the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* literature, some of Solomon's interpretations of the speeches of animals are given in al-Tha'labī's *'Arā'is al-majālis*.⁵⁰¹ The Qur'ān alludes to Solomon's divinely bestowed understanding of a judicial problem presented to his father David, and this has given rise to a detailed story illustrating his wisdom on that occasion.⁵⁰² As we turn now to that event, we will see how al-Suyūṭī has surpassed his predecessors in crediting wisdom to Solomon. The relevant Qur'ānic passage reads:

And remember David and Solomon, when they gave judgement regarding the field into which sheep strayed by night and grazed. We witnessed their judgement and made Solomon understand the case [better], though We gave sound judgement and knowledge to both of them.⁵⁰³

The *tafsīrs* of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Suyūṭī include various reports detailing the case and specifying the judgements issued by each of David and Solomon. A summary of the story will suffice here. Some sheep grazed in a vineyard. Therefore, the

⁴⁹⁹ Ibrahim b. 'Umar al-Biqā'ī, *Naẓm al-durar fī tanāsub al-āyāt wa-l-suwar* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīyah, 2006). On al-Biqā'ī's appreciation of Jeremiah see Walid Saleh, "A Fifteenth-Century Muslim Hebraist: al-Biqā'ī and His Defence of Using the Bible to Interpret the Qur'ān," in *Speculum* 83 (2008) 629-54, p. 636, n. 34; on al-Biqā'ī's justification of biblical citations in his Qur'ān commentary see Walid Saleh, *In Defense of the Bible: A Critical Edition and an Introduction to al-Biqā'ī's Bible Treatise* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); on the fact that al-Biqā'ī did not draw parallels between the biblical Proverbs and the wisdom of Luqmān see Walid Saleh, "'Sublime in its Style, Exquisite in its Tenderness': The Hebrew Bible Quotations in al-Biqā'ī's Qur'ān Commentary," in *Adaptations and Innovations: Studies on the Interaction between Jewish and Islamic Thought and Literature from the Early Middle Ages to the Late Twentieth Century, Dedicated to Professor Joel L. Kraemer*, ed. Y. Tzvi Langermann and Josef Stern (Paris; Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2007) pp. 331-47, p. 347.

⁵⁰⁰ See his exegesis of Qur'ān 21:79 and Qur'ān 27:15ff.

⁵⁰¹ See, for example, al-Tha'labī, *'Arā'is al-majālis fī qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā': or Lives of the Prophets*, trans. William M. Brinner (Leiden: Brill, 2002) pp. 493-95.

⁵⁰² On this motif see Haim Shwarzbaum, *Biblical and Extra-Biblical Legends in Islamic Folk-Literature* (Walldorf, Hessen: H. Vorndran, 1982) p. 63.

⁵⁰³ Qur'ān 21:78-79; trans. Abdel Haleem; brackets his.

owner of the vineyard lodged a complaint with David who then ruled in his favour. As compensation for the loss, David awarded the vintner possession of the offending sheep. But when Solomon got wind of that transaction, he suggested a different judgement. In Solomon's judgement, the shepherd should husband the vineyard until it is restored to its prior condition; meanwhile, and only for that limited duration, the vintner should benefit from possessing the sheep. Solomon's suggestion appealed to David as the just solution. Such, according to the exegetes, is the meaning of the above Qur'ānic statement that God caused Solomon to understand the case.⁵⁰⁴ Ibn Kathīr adds two narratives illustrating the sagacity of Solomon in revising his father's judgements.⁵⁰⁵ In one such narrative, Solomon was still a mere boy when he suggested the correct judgement. Al-Suyūfī included all of those traditions in his own *tafsīr*, adding even more narratives to illustrate the boy's astuteness.⁵⁰⁶

The last part of the above verses, Qur'ān 21:78-79, indicates that God granted sound judgement and knowledge to David and Solomon. Ibn Kathīr did not address this part of the verse specifically, but allowed his above discussion to serve as a commentary on the entire Qur'ānic passage. Al-Ṭabarī was cognizant of the need to address specifically the Qur'ānic words: "God had given to each *ḥukm* and '*ilm*.'"⁵⁰⁷ In the English translation of the verse given above, *ḥukm* is rendered as 'sound judgement,' and '*ilm* as 'knowledge.' According to al-Ṭabarī, however, *ḥukm* means *nubūwwah*

⁵⁰⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 17, pp. 62-66.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 5, pp. 2328-29.

⁵⁰⁶ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 10, pp. 318-26.

⁵⁰⁷ Qur'ān 21:79.

(prophethood).⁵⁰⁸ Adopting that meaning for *ḥukm* here, al-Ṭabarī makes the verse mean that David and Solomon are not the only prophets who were granted the said knowledge and sound judgement. Rather, al-Ṭabarī explains that the same blessings were also bestowed on each of the prophets who were mentioned since the start of the *sūrah*. With that explanation in mind, al-Ṭabarī was thus spared the need to think of any special wisdom that was granted to either David or Solomon.

Al-Ṭabarī ended his discussion of Qurʾān 21:78-79 by presenting a tradition which asserts that David was not blamed even though his verdict was not the most sound. This principle was further elaborated by Ibn Kathīr. According to Ibn Kathīr, a judge, having exerted his utmost, may reach an incorrect verdict and yet receive due credit for excellent effort.

In sum, according to these *tafsīr* works, both David and Solomon were given knowledge and sound judgement. The *tafsīrs* of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr and al-Suyūṭī each present the story showing how Solomon gave a better verdict than his father. In reference to the present verse, none of these *tafsīrs* show how David deserved praise for his *ḥukm* although, as Gutas has shown, there was also a collection of David's wisdom sayings available to early Muslims.⁵⁰⁹ Nonetheless, in reference to Qurʾān 21:78-79, only al-Suyūṭī provides a list of Solomon's sayings that serve to illustrate the sound judgement and knowledge that was given to Solomon. Al-Suyūṭī understood *ḥukm* to include *ḥikmah*, and thus furnished nine traditions containing sage advice from Solomon.

⁵⁰⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 17, p. 63.

⁵⁰⁹ Gutas, p. 19.

As presented by al-Suyūfī, Solomon’s aphorisms are interesting. Many of the sayings begin with the vocative, “O my son!” as is typical of Arabic aphorisms (*amthāl*). Some of Solomon’s sayings enjoin the fear of God, for example, “You are enjoined to fear God, for that covers everything.”⁵¹⁰ Such fear is to be maintained both in public and in privacy.⁵¹¹ But one should also fear the anger of an oppressive king, for his anger is like that of the angel of death.⁵¹² Some of these sayings counsel honesty and good conduct. For example, “It is amazing how the trader considers himself redeemed. He makes oaths during the day and yet sleeps well at night.”⁵¹³ In the same vein: “Just as the tent-peg penetrates between two stones, and a snake slithers between two rocks, sin enters between buyer and seller.”⁵¹⁴ Moreover, “Beware of slander, for it is like the edge of a sword.”⁵¹⁵ Some sayings contain practical advice: “It is a hard life to have to move from house to house.”⁵¹⁶ Practical also is a caution against extreme jealousy: “Do not be overly jealous with regards to your wife lest she be accused of evil because of you whereas she is innocent.”⁵¹⁷ On the other hand, one saying does not favour women: “Walk behind a lion, but do not walk behind a woman.”⁵¹⁸ Another would hardly appeal

⁵¹⁰ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 10, p. 327.

⁵¹¹ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 10, p. 326.

⁵¹² Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 10, p. 326.

⁵¹³ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 10, p. 328.

⁵¹⁴ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 10, p. 327.

⁵¹⁵ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 10, p. 328.

⁵¹⁶ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 10, p. 327.

⁵¹⁷ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 10, p. 326.

⁵¹⁸ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 10, p. 327.

to children: “If you wish to enrage your enemies, do not spare your son the rod.”⁵¹⁹ One pronouncement is especially suitable for Ṣūfī circles: “Do not decide on any action until you first consult a *murshid* (guide). In this way, you will have no anxiety over your decisions.”⁵²⁰ Other aphorisms encourage austerity: “We have experienced life with all its ease and hardships, and found that a bare minimum of the world suffices.”⁵²¹ Some snippets are especially terse: “Most delicious is the Spirit of God among his servants; most refreshing is God forgiving his servants, while his servants forgive each other; most at home is the soul while it is in the body; wildest is the body when it is stripped of the soul; least found among people is certitude; and most prevalent among them is doubt.”⁵²² Such are the wisdom sayings of Solomon which al-Suyūṭī took the trouble to accumulate from various sources. By including these maxims in his exegesis, al-Suyūṭī has demonstrated his keen interest not only in Solomon, but also in wisdom as a guide to proper conduct.

4.4 Luqmān

Qur’ān 31:12 states that God granted Luqmān *al-ḥikmah*. The seven verses following that, Qur’ān 31:13-19, depict Luqmān imparting his words of wisdom to his son. Luqmān has become an interesting Islamic figure due to the Qur’ānic reference to

⁵¹⁹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 10, p. 327. Cf. Proverbs 13:24, “He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him early”; Proverbs 23:13-14, “Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you beat him with a rod he will not die. Beat him with a rod and you will save him from the grave”; and Proverbs 29:15, “Rod and reproof produce wisdom, but a lad out of control is a disgrace to his mother.” *The Tanakh*, pp. 1306, 1322 and 1333.

⁵²⁰ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 10, p. 328.

⁵²¹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 10, p. 326.

⁵²² Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 10, p. 327.

him. Because he is mentioned only in the thirty-first *sūrah* of the Qur’ān, that *sūrah* came to be called *Sūrat Luqmān*. As a consequence of the inclusion of Luqmān’s name in the title of that *sūrah*, Luqmān remains prominent in Muslim memory. However, the secondary literature shows that little historical knowledge is available about Luqmān.⁵²³ Therefore, an attempt to identify him here would prove redundant and unnecessary. It is enough for our purposes here that the Qur’ān’s mention of him situates him as a sage in the pre-Islamic past. In contrast with Solomon, who in the Qur’ān is clearly a prophet, Luqmān’s Qur’ānic status is ambiguous.⁵²⁴ Of the early Qur’ānic commentators, only ‘Ikrimah held that Luqmān was a prophet; others insist that he was not.⁵²⁵ Hence, by including the extra-Qur’ānic wisdom sayings of this pre-Islamic savant, al-Suyūfī was clearly expanding the boundaries of what is acceptable in tradition-based exegesis.

Al-Ṭabarī mentions both views: the view of ‘Ikrimah affirming that Luqmān was a prophet; and the view of others denying it. Thus al-Ṭabarī supplies the traditions supporting both positions. Curiously, however, al-Ṭabarī did not state his own position on the question. As for *al-ḥikmah* which Luqmān was bestowed, al-Ṭabarī defines it as “the understanding of the religion, intelligence, and correctness in speech.”⁵²⁶ Some of the traditions he mentions support the three elements of that definition. In his exegesis of the verses dealing with Luqmān’s advice to his son, al-Ṭabarī limits himself to an

⁵²³ On the numerous suggestions as to the identity of Luqmān see B. Heller, “Luqmān,” in *EP*; A. H. M. Zahniser, “Luqmān,” in *EQ*; and F. C. Conybeare, et al, *The Story of Aḥikar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁵²⁴ From Qur’ān 4:163 it is clear that Solomon is a prophet.

⁵²⁵ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 6, p. 2748.

⁵²⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 21, p. 78.

explanation of the Qur’ānic statements. Thus al-Ṭabarī shows little interest in Luqmān’s wisdom sayings apart from those given in the Qur’ān. Al-Ṭabarī does present a few narratives attempting to identify Luqmān. But he offers only two traditions that indicate something about the wisdom of Luqmān aside from the Qur’ānic statements containing his advice. The first tradition shows Luqmān, a slave, interacting with his master. On the latter’s request for the best part of a slaughtered sheep, Luqmān brought him the tongue and the heart. On another occasion, the master’s request was for the worst parts. To his surprise, even now Luqmān brought him the tongue and the heart. But Luqmān explained that when these two parts are good they are the best; but when they are bad they are the worst.⁵²⁷ In the second tradition, Luqmān is shown lecturing people when he is asked what transformed him from shepherd to sage. He answered, “Truth in speech, and silence regarding that which does not concern me.”⁵²⁸ We will see that al-Suyūṭī was not content with these stories but ventured to present fifty-seven additional narratives containing wisdom sayings of Luqmān.

Appealing to the authority of the majority of the *salaf* (predecessors), Ibn Kathīr decided that Luqmān was not a prophet. Accordingly, Ibn Kathīr impugned the *ḥadīth* of ‘Ikrimah as having and unreliable *isnād*.⁵²⁹ Ibn Kathīr defines *al-ḥikmah* as “understanding, knowledge, and *ta’bīr* (expression).”⁵³⁰ Thus Ibn Kathīr shows no resolve here to maintain his earlier stance that reason means *sunnah*. After offering his

⁵²⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 21, p. 79.

⁵²⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 21, p. 80.

⁵²⁹ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 6, p. 2743.

⁵³⁰ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 6, p. 2744. *Ta’bīr* could also refer to the art of interpreting dreams, a gift for which the Qur’ānic prophet Joseph was also notable (see Qur’ān 12:43).

exegesis of the verses related to Luqmān, Ibn Kathīr presented five traditions containing wisdom sayings of Luqmān. This is a surprising development in his exegesis. Prior to Ibn Kathīr, al-Ṭabrisī had included several sayings of Luqmān in his *tafsīr*.⁵³¹ But now Ibn Kathīr, a Sunnī exegete who maintains conformity with the radical hermeneutics of Ibn Taymīyah, similarly presents sayings of Luqmān. The stage has thus been set for al-Suyūfī to not only repeat the sayings of Luqmān which Ibn Kathīr proffered but also to recount a great number of other sayings of Luqmān.⁵³²

As for the five sayings of Luqmān which Ibn Kathīr included, the first states that if anything is entrusted to God he takes care of it.⁵³³ The second cautions, “Do not mask your face, for that is feared at night; and it is humiliating during the day.” According to the third, *al-ḥikmah* causes the poor to sit in the company of kings. The fourth advises,

“When you approach a gathering, greet it with peace and then sit on the periphery not speaking until first observing how the conversation flows. If God is being mentioned abundantly, then participate. Otherwise, seek another gathering.”⁵³⁴

The fifth is more a legend than a wisdom saying. Luqmān placed a bag of mustard seeds beside him and began advising his son while discarding a mustard seed as he delivers each piece of advice. When the bag became empty, Luqmān said to his son, “I

⁵³¹ See above, p. 156, note 495.

⁵³² Neither Ibn Kathīr nor al-Suyūfī copied their wisdom traditions from al-Ṭabrisī. The latter’s exegesis contains some unique sayings of Luqmān, some of which were subsequently copied, with acknowledgement, into the *tafsīr* of Ibn ‘Āshūr (see Ibn ‘Āshūr, vol. 21, p. 172).

⁵³³ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 6, p. 2748.

⁵³⁴ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 6, p. 2748.

have given you such advice that is enough to cleave a mountain.” At that moment, Luqmān’s son was split apart.⁵³⁵ The story is rich with Qur’ānic allusions.⁵³⁶

Ibn Kathīr was aware that there are many more such wisdom sayings (*al-ḥikam wa-l-mawā’iz*) of Luqmān, but he wanted to offer the above only as examples of the lore. Ibn Kathīr was on safe traditional ground, for he relied on the Sunnī traditionist Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal for those five reports. Yet, as if to compensate for what must have appeared to him as a lapse from his resolute traditionalism, Ibn Kathīr then offered fifty-eight traditions containing advice from Muḥammad and early Muslims. Ibn Kathīr laid out these traditions under four headings: humility, integrity, pride, and boastfulness.⁵³⁷ By including these additional traditions, Ibn Kathīr has turned his readers’ attention away from Luqmān as a source of wisdom. Ibn Kathīr has now redirected attention to Muḥammad and his early followers as the fountains of wisdom. Ibn Kathīr has thus assured his readers of his intention to tow the line of traditionalism.

Al-Suyūṭī was more daring in this regard. Compared with Ibn Kathīr’s list of five sayings, al-Suyūṭī offered fifty-seven such sayings of Luqmān.⁵³⁸ Moreover, al-Suyūṭī did not follow this up with the wisdom sayings of anyone else. Hence in *al-Durr* the

⁵³⁵ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 6, p. 2748.

⁵³⁶ In Qur’ān 2:74 hearts are compared with rocks which may be split by water; and, according to Qur’ān 59:21, if the Qur’ān were revealed to a mountain the latter would have been humbled and split apart due to the awe of God.

⁵³⁷ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 6, pp. 2749-54.

⁵³⁸ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 11, pp. 629-46. The block of traditions in *al-Durr* to which I refer here contains two additional traditions which I have decided to exclude from the analysis since they are not so much wisdom sayings as they are accounts of how Luqmān became wise. But the section is not clearly demarcated. Therefore al-Suyūṭī was at liberty to incorporate the two additional traditions as the third and fourth among the total of fifty-nine traditions. From the fifth tradition onwards, however, al-Suyūṭī was clearly intent on making this a list of wisdom sayings of Luqmān to the exclusion of all else.

focus remains on the *ḥikmah* of Luqmān. Al-Suyūṭī's message is clear when seen in comparison with Ibn Kathīr's exegesis which he had before him: why mention the *ḥikmah* of others when the Qur'ān calls attention to the *ḥikmah* of Luqmān? The closeness of the numbers of comparable traditions in the two *tafsīrs* here is not coincidental. Whereas Ibn Kathīr relates fifty-eight traditions on the wisdom of others, al-Suyūṭī recounts fifty-seven traditions on the wisdom of Luqmān alone. Whereas Ibn Kathīr adduces twenty traditions to otherwise explain Qur'ān 31:12, that being the Qur'ān's first mention of Luqmān, al-Suyūṭī advances twenty comparable traditions as well.⁵³⁹ Clearly, al-Suyūṭī intended that his exegesis should not fall below the expectation left by the *tafsīrs* of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr in terms of the number of traditions it contains. More importantly, al-Suyūṭī wanted his exegesis to surpass these other *tafsīrs* in verbalizing and highlighting the wisdom of Luqmān.

Al-Suyūṭī's innovativeness is also marked by his choice of sources. Unlike Ibn Kathīr, al-Suyūṭī did not restrict himself to Ibn Ḥanbal as his source for Luqmān's sayings. The fifty-seven sayings of Luqmān, which al-Suyūṭī presents at this single location in *al-Durr*, were gathered from a wide variety of sources. For example, among the sources which al-Suyūṭī cites for the first saying is *Kitāb amthāl al-ḥadīth al-marwīyah 'an al-nabī* by Abī al-Ḥasan b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Khallād al-Rāmhurmuzī.⁵⁴⁰ The nature of this source is interesting, for it is a book of *amthāl* (proverbs). Likewise,

⁵³⁹ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 6, pp. 2742-44; and al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 11, pp. 624-29.

⁵⁴⁰ For the tradition cited, see al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 11, p. 629. The tradition in question is located in Abī al-Ḥasan b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Khallād al-Rāmhurmuzī, *Kitāb amthāl al-ḥadīth al-marwīyah 'an al-nabī*, ed. Aḥmad 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Tammām (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyah, 1988) p. 88. Al-Rāmhurmuzī is identified in al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a'lām al-nubalā'* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1997) in *al-Marjī'* flash disk, vol. 12, p. 232. In al-Dhahabī's discussion it is clear that the precise date of al-Rāmhurmuzī's death is unknown, though it cannot be far from 360/970.

among the sources for his seventh tradition, al-Suyūṭī mentions *Kitāb jamharat al-amthāl* by Abū Hilāl al-‘Askarī, this being a collection and an analysis of proverbs.⁵⁴¹ Al-Suyūṭī’s use of such sources shows his willingness to go outside of the *tafsīr* tradition to find snippets of wisdom. He then introduced these into the *tafsīr* stream.

As for the contents of Luqmān’s wisdom sayings, a synopsis will suffice. However, we should note from the start that the sayings presented by al-Suyūṭī are of a different nature from that of the sayings found in a popular collection of Luqmān’s fables. I refer here to the Paris manuscript of *Amthāl Luqmān al-Ḥakīm* which was edited and translated into French by Derenbourg, and was discussed in the *Encyclopedia of Islam*.⁵⁴² The legends in *Amthāl Luqmān* have more in common with the tales of *Kalīlah wa Dimnah* than they do with the aphorisms found in *al-Durr*.⁵⁴³ In such legends, in both the Paris manuscript and in *Kalīlah wa Dimnah*, animals are personified to demonstrate maxims. For example, the first story from the Paris manuscript is a parable involving two oxen and a lion. As long as the oxen formed a cohesive defence, the lion could not risk attacking them, for fear of their horns. But the lion confided in one of the oxen, thus managing to separate them. Then he ravished both of them. The moral of the story, also

⁵⁴¹ For the wisdom saying in question, see al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 11, pp. 631-32, and Abū Hilāl al-‘Askarī, *Kitāb jamharat al-amthāl* (Cairo: al-Mu’assasat al-‘Arabiyyah al-Ḥadīthah, 1964) 2 vols., vol. 1, p. 569. Al-‘Askarī has been identified in al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi bi-l-wafayāt* in *al-Marjī*’ flash disk. The date of his death cannot be ascertained. Al-Ṣafadī notes, however, that the colophon in al-‘Askarī’s *Kitāb al-awā’il* indicates that the author had dictated the latter book in 395/1004.

⁵⁴² See B. Heller, “Luqmān,” in *EF*²; J. Derenbourg, *Amthāl Luqmān al-Ḥakīm: Fables de Loqman le Sage* (Berlin: A. Asher, 1850). The Arabic text of this work was translated into Ottoman Turkish and published together with Derenbourg’s French translation by Yaḥyá Efendiniñ, *Emsāl ül-Loqmān* (Istanbul: Maṭba‘asinda Başılmışdır, 1875).

⁵⁴³ See Munther A. Younes, *Tales From Kalīla wa-Dimna: an Arabic reader* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

mentioned in the manuscript, is as follows: If the people of two towns agree, no enemy could overcome them; but if they differ, they would all be destroyed.⁵⁴⁴

The traditions selected by al-Suyūfī, on the other hand, contain only the maxims attributed to Luqmān. Among these traditions, seldom do we encounter a legend leading to a maxim; and, even in the few legends we do encounter, no animal is ever anthropomorphised. In one tradition, for example, Luqmān, intending to illustrate his point that God can bring forth a mustard seed buried in a rock, threw a seed into the Yarmūk river. Before long, a fly picked it up and alighted on Luqmān's palm thus returning the seed.⁵⁴⁵ In another legend, Luqmān tried in vain to convince his son to be content regardless of the circumstances. While they were on a journey, however, their food and drink were soon depleted, and the son, eventually famished and exhausted, fell on a broken bone thus suffering a serious injury. Adding to his son's consternation, Luqmān insisted that these dire straits were better than their possible alternatives. He was soon vindicated, for Gabriel, arriving on the scene, replenished their food and drink and restored the health of the son. Moreover, he informed them that he was mandated to destroy the town to which they were headed, but he had prayed that God will spare Luqmān and his son the agony. It was in answer to Gabriel's prayer that they were delayed by their sufferings. After receiving this lesson in theodicy and divine providence, Luqmān and his son were miraculously transported back to their hometown.⁵⁴⁶ It is clear,

⁵⁴⁴ Derenbourg, p. 42.

⁵⁴⁵ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 11, p. 635. This tradition alludes to Qur'an 31:16 wherein Luqmān cautions his son, "Even if a mustard seed were hidden in a rock . . . God would bring it forth."

⁵⁴⁶ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 11, pp. 633-35.

then, that these traditions are of a different order than are the tales of the Paris manuscript.

Some of Luqmān's sayings in *al-Durr* demonstrate the liberty with which biblical wisdom was credited to Luqmān, and with which the same wisdom sayings were attributed variously to Luqmān, Jesus or Muḥammad. For example, al-Suyūṭī cites a composite tradition from Aḥmad on the authority of Hisham b. 'Urwah who reports that his father said the following:

It is written in *al-ḥikmah*, meaning *al-ḥikmah* of Luqmān: "Let your word be good, and your face simple. Then you would be more beloved to people than one who gives them gifts." It is written in *al-ḥikmah* or in the Torah: "Kindness is the beginning of wisdom." It is written in the Torah: "As you are merciful to others, you will be shown mercy." It is written in *al-ḥikmah*: "As you sow, so shall you reap." It is written in *al-ḥikmah*: "Love your friend and your father's friend."⁵⁴⁷

What is basically Jesus' beatitude on mercy (Matthew 5:7) is here credited to Luqmān. The advice that you will reap what you sow, here attributed to *al-ḥikmah*, is a popular motif found in many biblical passages.⁵⁴⁸ We have seen above that al-Suyūṭī had credited to Muḥammad the following maxim: "Kindness is the beginning of wisdom."⁵⁴⁹ Now the same maxim is credited to Luqmān. Moreover, as can be seen from the above tradition, the reporter is uncertain as to whether the Torah or *al-ḥikmah* is the basis of that maxim. These maxims are, of course, tools to think with, and their true origins mattered but little. Hence, when al-Suyūṭī asserts that the first of his fifty-seven traditions rests on

⁵⁴⁷ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 11, p. 640.

⁵⁴⁸ In the *Tanakh* among the Nevi'im see Hosea 8:7; among the Kethuvim see Psalm 126:5 and Job 4:8; and in the New Testament see Galatians 6:7 and James 3:18.

⁵⁴⁹ Al-Suyūṭī, vol. 3, p. 290.

a weak *isnād*, he is offering an obvious gambit. By denigrating one tradition, he raises the value of the others.

Some of these sayings praise silence, for example, “If speech is made of silver; silence is golden.”⁵⁵⁰ Moreover, “Silence belongs to wisdom, but few practice it.”⁵⁵¹ And, “As long as you are silent you are safe.”⁵⁵² In the same vein, one is encouraged to mind one’s own business.⁵⁵³ Of course there are times when one cannot be silent. Hence, as often occurs with proverbs, there is also the counter saying, “One who speaks and is aware of God is better than one who is silent and is aware of God.”⁵⁵⁴ Luqmān praises wisdom: “The hand of God is on the mouths of the wise; none of them speaks except what God has made ready for him.”⁵⁵⁵ He advises his son to “listen to the speech of the wise.”⁵⁵⁶ At the same time, one has to beware of extreme anger, for that causes the mind of the wise to go blank.⁵⁵⁷ Hence one should test a fellow by first making him angry and then take him for a friend only if he retains good judgement while he is angry.⁵⁵⁸ Real situations will bring out true character: the forbearing person will be known when anger is expected; the brave person will be known at the time of war; and your real brother will

⁵⁵⁰ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 11, p. 638. This remains a popular proverb: “*In kāna al-kalāmu min fiddah; fa-l-sukūtu min dhahab.*”

⁵⁵¹ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 11, p. 632.

⁵⁵² Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 11, p. 644.

⁵⁵³ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 11, p. 637.

⁵⁵⁴ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 11, p. 643.

⁵⁵⁵ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 11, p. 637.

⁵⁵⁶ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 11, p. 629.

⁵⁵⁷ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 11, pp. 638-39.

⁵⁵⁸ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 11, p. 645.

be known when you need him.⁵⁵⁹ Luqmān counsels moderation in disposition: “Do not be sweet lest you be swallowed; nor be bitter lest you be spat out.”⁵⁶⁰ Likewise he teaches moderation in diet: one is not to eat beyond one’s fill, for it is better to throw the excess to the dogs that to consume more than is appropriate.⁵⁶¹ At the same time, health is wealth.⁵⁶² Poverty is most bitter.⁵⁶³ One should avoid falling into debt, for being indebted is humiliating in the daytime and distressing at night.⁵⁶⁴ Luqmān knows the nature of people: “It is easier to lift heavy burdens than to bear up with a bad neighbour.”⁵⁶⁵ Moreover, “If a man comes to you showing that his eyes have been plucked, do not render judgement until his adversary arrives. For, on the latter’s arrival you may discover that his eyes were also plucked.”⁵⁶⁶ Many of the sayings teach familiar pietistic themes such as the fear of God and repentance.⁵⁶⁷ However, one should not publicise one’s fear of God lest one is honoured by others on this account while, in fact, his heart is evil.⁵⁶⁸ The above summary of Luqmān’s sayings in *al-Durr* will suffice to show the nature of the sayings and the advice they contain.

⁵⁵⁹ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 11, p. 645.

⁵⁶⁰ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 11, p. 636.

⁵⁶¹ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 11, p. 636.

⁵⁶² Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 11, p. 635.

⁵⁶³ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 11, pp. 632 and 642.

⁵⁶⁴ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 11, p. 646.

⁵⁶⁵ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 11, pp. 632 and 636.

⁵⁶⁶ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 11, p. 646.

⁵⁶⁷ For example, see Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 11, pp. 633, 636 and 646.

⁵⁶⁸ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 11, p. 637.

In sum, al-Suyūṭī's purposive inclusion of such a large number of these adages serves to highlight their importance. Whereas al-Ṭabarī included none of them, and Ibn Kathīr included only five, al-Suyūṭī inflated the number of sayings to fifty-seven. Moreover, by presenting a large number of other dicta, Ibn Kathīr drew attention away from the few sayings of Luqmān which he did include. On the other hand, al-Suyūṭī not only increased exponentially the number of Luqmān's sayings, but retained the reader's focus exclusively on the sage's sayings. Clearly, al-Suyūṭī has now restored the wisdom sayings to a position of importance in exegesis after it had been sidelined to non-religious literature.

In my previous chapter, we saw that both the *tafsīrs* of al-Shawkānī and al-Ālūsī had been influenced by al-Suyūṭī's inclusion of legends. Here, however, we will see that al-Shawkānī did not lift up the banner of Luqmān's sayings. His reasons for not including the sayings are interesting, however, as they represent a reaction to al-Suyūṭī's presentation of these sayings. Al-Shawkānī's reaction unwittingly highlights the gravity of what al-Suyūṭī had done, and hence its importance for the historiography of the *tafsīr* tradition. Nonetheless, as we will see, al-Ālūsī copied thirteen of these sayings from al-Suyūṭī, though without acknowledgement. Subsequently, Ibn 'Āshūr copied the said sayings from al-Ālūsī and cited some additional sayings of Luqmān from other works. Hence al-Suyūṭī has succeeded in leaving a legacy of these sayings in the work of al-Ālūsī and, indirectly, in that of Ibn 'Āshūr. Incidentally, these developments show that tradition-based exegesis is all but predictable.

4.5 Al-Shawkānī's Reaction

The significance of al-Suyūṭī's bold adjustment of tradition-based hermeneutics will be seen from al-Shawkānī's strong reaction. The latter, aware of what al-Suyūṭī had done, reported only one saying of Luqmān, this given on the authority of Muḥammad: "If anything is entrusted to God he takes care of it."⁵⁶⁹ Then al-Shawkānī wrote:

A group of the people of *ḥadīth* has mentioned narrations from a group of the Companions and Successors that include words of advice of Luqmān and his wisdom sayings (*ḥikam*). But nothing of this is authentically related on the prophet's authority, and nothing of this is established by an authentic chain of narrators reaching back to Luqmān in order for us to accept the sayings as his. God has related some of Luqmān's advice to his son at this place in the Qur'ān, and that is sufficient. What is beyond that is not authentic. Hence they are of no interest except to those who are preoccupied with gathering such data and having time to waste. Moreover, Luqmān was not a prophet. Otherwise, what is related on his authority would have comprised a *sharī'ah* prior to ours.⁵⁷⁰

Al-Shawkānī has thus summarized the issues: Luqmān was not a prophet. Hence there is no need to know what he said beyond what the Qur'ān relates. Sure enough, a single saying of Luqmān is authentically related on the authority of Muḥammad. Al-Shawkānī explains further that Muslims should reclaim such a saying as their own property once lost.⁵⁷¹ But, to al-Shawkānī, that is the only authentic saying of Luqmān apart from what is related in the Qur'ān. Therefore, as far as al-Shawkānī is concerned, any attempt to collect Luqmān's sayings is an exercise in futility. Al-Shawkānī's sentiments show, indirectly, the significance of al-Suyūṭī's bold move. Al-Suyūṭī has now

⁵⁶⁹ Al-Shawkānī, p. 1376.

⁵⁷⁰ Al-Shawkānī, p. 1376.

⁵⁷¹ Al-Shawkānī, p. 1376.

compiled a *tafsīr* which, in terms of form, is strictly tradition-based, and yet it contains materials that suggest a reason-based hermeneutic.

4.6 Al-Suyūṭī's Influence on al-Ālūsī

In his commentary on Qur'ān 31:12, al-Ālūsī copied from al-Suyūṭī thirteen of Luqmān's sayings.⁵⁷² Al-Ālūsī prefaced the collection of sayings with the statement that these are among the wisdom sayings of Luqmān.⁵⁷³ After adducing the sayings, al-Ālūsī indicated that there are other sayings of Luqmān which are too many to recount.⁵⁷⁴ As we have seen above, al-Ālūsī's use of *al-Durr* is certain. But here he does not credit his source for Luqmān's maxims. At first glance, the order in which he exhibited the sayings does not reveal his dependence on *al-Durr*. On closer inspection, however, it becomes evident that al-Ālūsī made three passes over al-Suyūṭī's list of Luqmān's sayings thus choosing a few sayings with each scan. For the convenience of comparing the list of sayings in the two *tafsīrs*, I have numbered the sayings in *al-Durr* from one to fifty-seven.⁵⁷⁵ Given this numbering, the traditions appear in al-Ālūsī's *tafsīr* in the following order: 36, 39, 49, 55, 56, 16, 17, 30, 34, 51, 31, 40 and 47. It is now manifest that, on the first scan, al-Ālūsī chose traditions 36, 39, 49, 55 and 56. Finding himself at the end of the collection, but desiring more traditions, he scanned the sayings again and selected

⁵⁷² Al-Ālūsī, vol. 11, p. 98-99.

⁵⁷³ Al-Ālūsī, vol. 11, p. 98.

⁵⁷⁴ Al-Ālūsī, vol. 11, p. 98.

⁵⁷⁵ In *al-Durr* I have omitted from the sequence the third and fourth traditions; otherwise there are a total of fifty-nine traditions in the section. I omitted the third tradition because it is not so much a wisdom saying as it is an account of how Luqmān became wise. I omitted the fourth tradition because it is a replica of the third. In any event, the present comparison is not affected by this numerical adjustment, since my conclusion rests on the sequence of the traditions cited by al-Ālūsī. My conclusion does not depend on the specific number I have assigned to each tradition.

traditions 16, 17, 30, 34 and 51. Still not satisfied, al-Ālūsī went back over the maxims for a third sweep now picking up traditions 31, 40 and 47.

4.7 Indirect Influence on Ibn ‘Āshūr

Ibn ‘Āshūr in his exegesis has on occasion noted his use of al-Suyūṭī’s works in general. On one occasion he also acknowledged his perusal specifically of *al-Durr*.⁵⁷⁶ However, it is strange that he did not consult *al-Durr* for the exegesis of the verses regarding Luqmān. He wrote that while he was composing his exegesis, he came across thirty-eight wisdom sayings of Luqmān apart from those which are mentioned in the Qur’ān.⁵⁷⁷ When he sets out to recount these thirty-eight sayings, Ibn ‘Āshūr adds that the first twenty-eight of these were already mentioned by al-Ālūsī.⁵⁷⁸ Of course, as we have seen above, there are only thirteen such traditions in al-Ālūsī’s *tafsīr*. However, Ibn ‘Āshūr may have counted not the number of traditions he was copying, but the number of separable sayings he could identify within those traditions. Even so, it seems to me that Ibn ‘Āshūr copied from al-Ālūsī’s *tafsīr* not twenty-eight, but nineteen sayings, and that he copied another nineteen from other sources. That would bring the total number of sayings to thirty-eight, the very number of sayings which Ibn ‘Āshūr indicated that he was presenting. My point here, however, is not about the specific number of traditions in these works. I am concerned specifically with al-Suyūṭī’s influence on the later exegetes. Since the traditions which Ibn ‘Āshūr copied from al-Ālūsī were in turn copied from al-

⁵⁷⁶ See his exegesis of Qur’ān 67: 9 where he writes of a certain tradition, “I have not come across it in what I have seen of *tafsīr* books. Al-Suyūṭī did not mention it in the tradition-based *tafsīr* (*al-tafsīr bi-l-ma’thūr*) either in Sūrat al-Ṭūr or in Surat al-Mulk (Ibn ‘Āshūr, vol. 29, p. 27).

⁵⁷⁷ Ibn ‘Āshūr, vol. 21, p. 151.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibn ‘Āshūr, vol. 21, p. 169.

Suyūṭī, it is clear that al-Suyūṭī’s work was not in vain. Through his efforts to gather such a large number of the sayings of Luqmān, al-Suyūṭī has made an impression on al-Ālūsī, and the latter has in turn influenced Ibn ‘Āshūr.

4.8 Summary

The Qur’ān repeatedly praised *al-ḥikmah*, which normally means ‘wisdom,’ as a guide to proper conduct. But, al-Shafi‘ī argued that *al-ḥikmah* in the Qur’ān refers to the *sunnah* of Muḥammad which was revealed to him by God along with the Qur’ānic revelation. The exegetes al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr followed al-Shafi‘ī’s argument. They both did their best to render the various occurrences of the word *al-ḥikmah* as the *sunnah*. Al-Suyūṭī followed suit—as long as the word *al-ḥikmah* was used in reference to Muḥammad and his teaching office. Such, for example, was the case in al-Suyūṭī’s exegesis of Qur’ān 2:129.

But when *al-ḥikmah* referred to a blessing of God that could be conferred on individuals other than prophets, the suggestion that *al-ḥikmah* refers to the *sunnah* becomes rather strained. Such is the situation with the exegesis of Qur’ān 2:269. It is here that al-Suyūṭī begins to break new ground in Sunnī tradition-based exegesis. In his exegesis of that verse al-Suyūṭī added a wisdom saying of Luqmān to indicate the meaning of *al-ḥikmah* as wisdom. Al-Suyūṭī’s lasting influence on the exegesis of Qur’ān 2:269 is evident from the fact that the later exegete al-Ālūsī copied that saying of Luqmān from *al-Durr*.

Al-Durr’s distinction vis-a-vis the *tafsīrs* of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr is even more pronounced in the discussions that followed from Qur’ān 3:48, 21:78, and 31:12. In response to these verses, al-Suyūṭī supplied a list of wisdom sayings attributed to each of

Jesus, Solomon and Luqmān. As was seen above, wisdom sayings had been sidelined from religious literature and relegated to belles-lettres. Hence it is significant that al-Suyūṭī has now included these sayings in the *tafsīr* tradition. He does not deserve sole credit for doing so. Two earlier exegetes, al-Ṭabrisī and Ibn Kathīr, had recounted some of the wisdom sayings of Luqmān, though not of Jesus and Solomon. But each of these two exegetes recounted only a few such sayings in comparison with al-Suyūṭī's sizeable collection. The Sunnī *tafsīr*, that of Ibn Kathīr, which it was al-Suyūṭī's intention to outstrip, contained only five such sayings. Moreover, Ibn Kathīr immediately neutralizes the effect of these sayings of Luqmān by appending ten times that number of the sayings of Muḥammad and his early followers. Here too, in Ibn Kathīr's *tafsīr*, it is the *sunnah* that eclipses every other teaching. But *al-Durr* is outstanding not only for containing the maxims of Jesus, Solomon and Luqmān in such large numbers, but also for affording them positions of prominence.

Al-Shawkānī mentioned only one tradition depicting Luqmān's wisdom. Aware that al-Suyūṭī has worked at collecting many more of the wisdom sayings of Luqmān, al-Shawkānī demeaned such work as a waste of time. Moreover, he characterized the wisdom sayings as being of dubious authenticity and, in any case, of no relevance to Muslims. To al-Shawkānī, Muslims do not need to know anything more about Luqmān than what is mentioned in the Qur'ān and in the verified speeches of Muḥammad. Incidentally, al-Shawkānī's statement on the worthlessness of Luqmān's extra-Qur'ānic sayings shows the boldness of al-Suyūṭī in venturing to accumulate the very sayings. In any case, al-Suyūṭī's work has influenced that of al-Ālūsī in this regard. Al-Ālūsī in his *tafsīr* copied thirteen of Luqmān's adages from al-Suyūṭī. Subsequently, Ibn 'Āshūr in his

tafsīr copied these adages from al-Ālūsī. In this way, al-Suyūṭī's lasting influence on the *tafsīr* tradition is established, and the wisdom sayings gain a strong foothold in a new literary tradition.

Chapter 5

Jesus' Wisdom and Ṣūfī Exegesis

“God will teach Jesus the Scripture and wisdom, the Torah and the Gospel.”

—Qur’ān 3:48

5.1 Introduction

We have seen al-Suyūṭī’s interest in stories in his depiction of Idrīs. And we have seen al-Suyūṭī’s interest in wisdom sayings in his depiction of Luqmān. We will now see these two interests coming together in al-Suyūṭī’s presentation of Jesus. Al-Suyūṭī brings together legends about Jesus portraying him as a wandering teacher of wisdom. We will see that whereas *al-Durr* is in the form of a tradition-based *tafsīr*, it incorporates Ṣūfī exegesis credited to Jesus. Al-Suyūṭī depicts Jesus, in his childhood, as an esoteric commentator. In some of these stories, the child Jesus is seen at school commenting on the letters of the alphabet and of the *basmalah*, the Qur’ān’s opening formula. This coalescence of legend, wisdom, and Ṣūfī exegesis is found in al-Suyūṭī’s *tafsīr* of Qur’ān 3:48. That verse reads: “He will teach him the Scripture and wisdom, the Torah and the Gospel.”⁵⁷⁹ The meaning of Qur’ān 3:48 becomes clearer if we replace the pronouns with nouns, justified by the context, as follows: “God will teach Jesus the Scripture and wisdom, the Torah and the Gospel.”

⁵⁷⁹ Qur’ān 3:48, trans. M. Abdel Haleem, p. 38.

Qur’ān 3:48 is part of a longer passage in which the angels alert Mary to her imminent conception of Jesus. Two verses earlier, in Qur’ān 3:46, the angels informed Mary that Jesus will speak to people even from his cradle. The exegetes generally take that as a reference to the time of Jesus’ nursing.⁵⁸⁰ Having established the context, I turn now to a closer study of Qur’ān 3:48. In that verse, the angels apprise Mary that God will teach Jesus “*al-kitāb* (the Scripture) and *al-ḥikmah* (wisdom), the Torah and the Gospel.”⁵⁸¹ The entire discussion of the present chapter revolves around Qur’ān 3:48. Hence it will be helpful if readers keep in mind that aspect of Qur’ān 3:48 which is most relevant to the present study—the assertion that God taught Jesus the Scripture and wisdom. I will occasionally remind readers that Qur’ān 3:48 is “on the wisdom of Jesus.”

In his commentary on Qur’ān 3:48, al-Suyūṭī’s presentation of Jesus is entirely distinctive. Al-Suyūṭī’s task was to explain the assertion, in Qur’ān 3:48, that God taught Jesus *al-kitāb* (the Scripture) and *al-ḥikmah* (wisdom). The most common meaning of *al-kitāb* is ‘the book’; and Abdel Haleem justifiably renders *al-kitāb* in Qur’ān 3:48 as ‘the Scripture.’ However, al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Suyūṭī all took *al-kitāb* in Qur’ān 3:48 to mean *al-kitābah* (the art of writing).⁵⁸² To explain the assertion that God taught Jesus the art of writing, al-Suyūṭī presents an interesting story of Jesus attending school. As we will see, the story proves that Jesus had already been divinely schooled. Moreover, to explain the assertion that God taught Jesus wisdom, al-Suyūṭī recounted one hundred and

⁵⁸⁰ Qur’ān 19:30-33 also depicts Jesus speaking during his childhood.

⁵⁸¹ Qur’ān 3:48.

⁵⁸² Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 3, p. 321; Ibn Kathīr, vol. 2, p. 709; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, pp. 550.

four wisdom sayings of Jesus. Al-Suyūṭī collected these wisdom sayings of Jesus from a wide variety of early Muslim sources.

In reference to Qur’ān 3:48, among the major classical exegetes only al-Suyūṭī included the story of Jesus at school. The story begins with Mary entrusting Jesus to a school-teacher so that he could learn the art of writing. As we will see, the story ends when the pupil confounds his bewildered pedagogue with allegorical exegesis. Al-Suyūṭī’s merging of Ṣūfī exegesis with tradition-based *tafsīr* is a surprising development. As Annabel Keeler asserted, mystical exegesis from about the 3rd/9th century had separated itself from mainstream exoteric commentary.⁵⁸³ Similarly, Saleh has shown that although al-Tha’labī managed to merge mystical and mainstream exegesis, the *tafsīr* tradition remained hostile to Ṣūfī exegesis.⁵⁸⁴

Al-Suyūṭī derived his story of Jesus’ childhood years exclusively from Muslim tradition.⁵⁸⁵ The story shows Jesus explicating the letters of the alphabet in a manner similar to that which was later adopted by Ṣūfī Qur’ānic exegetes. As will be discussed below, these exegetes often take individual letters of the Qur’ān as initials for select theological vocabulary. By including the unusual story of Jesus espousing this type of exegesis, al-Suyūṭī shatters the stereotypical presentation of Jesus found in Qur’ānic

⁵⁸³ Annabel Keeler, *Ṣūfī Hermeneutics: the Qur’an Commentary of Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) p. 9.

⁵⁸⁴ Saleh, *Formation*, p. 152, 154.

⁵⁸⁵ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, pp. 550-53; cf. Luke 2:41-52; The story intersects with Luke’s Gospel (2:41-52); and reveals interesting parallels with the Infancy Gospel of Thomas 6:14-21 and 14:1-4, in Ronald F. Hock, *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas* (Santa Rosa: Polebridge, 1995) pp. 116-17 and 132-33. For a study of the parallels between the Gospel of Luke and the Infancy Gospel of Thomas on the one hand, and the Qur’ān on the other, see Vernon K. Robbins, “Lukan and Johannine Tradition in the Qur’an: A story of (and Program for) *Auslegungsgeschichte* and *Wirkungsgeschichte*,” in *Moving Beyond New Testament Theology? Essays in Conversation with Heikki Raisanen*, ed. Todd Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele (Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 2005) 336-68.

exegeses. Moreover, al-Suyūṭī simultaneously subverts the mainstream exegetical tradition’s suspicion of Ṣūfī exegesis. As for the stereotypical image of Jesus, Neal Robinson has studied a representative sample of Ṣūfī and other genres of exegesis from the Sunnī and Shī‘ī streams. From that study, Robinson concluded as follows: “The classical commentaries represent Jesus in a manner which is fairly constant, and it makes little difference whether their authors are Sunnīs or Shī‘īs.”⁵⁸⁶

As for the misgivings of the mainstream exegetical tradition about Ṣūfī *tafsīr*, Keeler stated that, after al-Ghazālī, Ṣūfism no longer needed to be preoccupied with defending its right to existence.⁵⁸⁷ Yet Ṣūfī *tafsīr* in general was relegated to the sidelines of the mainstream exegetical tradition. Al-Sulamī’s *tafsīr* in particular had been strongly denounced by al-Wāḥidī.⁵⁸⁸ Thus, by introducing the story showing Jesus as an esoteric exegete, al-Suyūṭī not only challenges the stereotypical view of Jesus, but also supports Ṣūfī *tafsīr*.

Having mastered the tools of tradition-based exegesis, al-Suyūṭī used these tools to launch a theoretical as well as a practical defence of Ṣūfī exegesis.⁵⁸⁹ In terms of theory, in his *Itqān* al-Suyūṭī defends esoteric commentary in general provided that two conditions are satisfied. First, such esoteric commentary should not replace but merely supplement tradition-based *tafsīr*. Second, such exegesis should not involve the

⁵⁸⁶ Neal Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity* (Albany: SUNY, 1991) p. 191.

⁵⁸⁷ Keeler, p. 6.

⁵⁸⁸ On al-Wāḥidī’s antagonism to the exegesis of al-Sulamī see Saleh, *Formation*, pp. 152-53.

⁵⁸⁹ On the proponents and opponents of Ṣūfī exegesis see Kristin Zahra Sands, *Ṣūfī Commentaries on the Qur’ān in Classical Islam* (London: Routledge, 2006) pp. 47-63.

recombination of a verse's letters to form new words.⁵⁹⁰ In terms of practice, in *al-Durr al-Suyūfī* uses the formal features of tradition-based exegesis to showcase esoteric exegesis. Although the Ṣūfī exegetes are attuned to allegorical *tafsīr*, they fail to highlight Jesus' role as the pioneer of such exegesis. Thus, in his presentation of Jesus as a child explicating the alphabet, al-Suyūfī has surpassed even the Ṣūfī exegetes.

Likewise in his illustration of Jesus' wisdom as an adult, al-Suyūfī supersedes both Ṣūfī and tradition-based exegetes. He calmly presented one hundred and four sayings of Jesus under the caption: "A mention of snippets of wisdom from Jesus on whom be peace."⁵⁹¹ In this way, in his exegesis of Qur'ān 3:48, al-Suyūfī shows both his love of legend and his penchant for wisdom sayings. At the same time, al-Suyūfī also makes evident his deep interest in the person of Jesus as a wandering ascetic. None of the other *tafsīrs* mentioned in the present study includes the wisdom sayings of Jesus with reference to Qur'ān 3:48. Moreover, it is doubtful that these *tafsīrs* mention such a large stock of Jesus' sayings at other locations.⁵⁹²

As for the story of Jesus espousing esoteric exegesis at school, this was mentioned in brief in some Ṣūfī *tafsīrs* at locations other than Qur'ān 3:48. I have examined numerous tradition-based exegeses prior to *al-Durr*. Of these, I have found that only the

⁵⁹⁰ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Itqān*, vols. 3-4, pp. 485-88. On p. 486 al-Suyūfī gives an example of the objectionable re-combination of letters which an unidentified would-be exegete is said to have attempted. First, the exegete disregarded spaces between words. Second, he inserted new spaces as he pleased. Thus he obtained a new string of words from the original string of letters.

⁵⁹¹ Qur'ān 3:48; al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, p. 48.

⁵⁹² Jesus is mentioned by name twenty-five times in the Qur'ān. It would be beyond the scope of this study to investigate in detail the numerous exegeses at each of those locations.

exegesis of Ibn al-Mundhir (d. 318/930) mentioned the story in connection with Qur'ān 3:48.⁵⁹³

Ibn Abī Ḥātim does not speak of Jesus at school. However, in his commentary on the beginning of the Qur'ān's first and second *sūrahs* (Qur'ān 1:1 and 2:1) Ibn Abī Ḥātim shows Jesus explicating the alphabet.⁵⁹⁴ As for Ibn Mardawayh, both al-Suyūṭī and Ibn Kathīr in their respective exegeses of Qur'ān 1:1 cite his now lost work as having contained the story, presumably at Qur'ān 1:1.⁵⁹⁵ However, the two tradition-based *tafsīrs* which came to be known as the prime examples of the genre, those of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr, omitted the story at Qur'ān 3:48. Where al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr did mention the story, at the beginning of the Qur'ān's first *sūrah* (Quran 1:1), they did so only to dismiss the story.

On the other hand, al-Suyūṭī demonstrated his interest in the story in several ways. Al-Suyūṭī shored up the authenticity of the narratives containing the story, and increased the number of narratives and their sources. As for the story itself, al-Suyūṭī presented expanded versions of it, and made reference to it at multiple locations in his work. Yet at the single location, Qur'ān 3:48, the combination of Jesus' boyhood legend and wisdom sayings render al-Suyūṭī's exegesis unique among all the other Qur'ān exegeses which I have encountered.

⁵⁹³ Ibn al-Mundhir, *Kitāb Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, ed. Sa'd b. Muḥammad al-Sa'd (Medina: Dār al-Ma'āthir, 2002) vol. 1, pp. 204-5. What survives is only a part of the original work spanning the commentary on Qur'ān 2:227 to Qur'ān 4:92.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibn Abī Ḥātim, vol. 1, pp. 16 and 25.

⁵⁹⁵ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 1, p. 38; Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 144.

As Walid Saleh has shown, al-Biqā'ī included many of Jesus' Gospel sayings in his exegesis of the Qur'ān's second *sūrah*, particularly Qur'ān 2:87 and 2:253. It is therefore necessary to take stock both of al-Biqā'ī's innovation and the limitations of his work with respect to the present investigation.⁵⁹⁶ Al-Biqā'ī used Matthew's Sermon on the Mount as the main thread, interweaving verses from the other three Gospels with such literary skill that Saleh characterized the result as an Islamic Diatessaron.⁵⁹⁷ As we will see, the work of al-Biqā'ī provided some impetus for al-Suyūfī to seek out the wisdom sayings of Jesus. But at Qur'ān 3:48 al-Biqā'ī included neither the story about Jesus' verbal sparring with his schoolteacher, nor the wisdom sayings of the adult Jesus.⁵⁹⁸

At Qur'ān 3:63, the Qur'ān concludes its present narrative about Jesus, and is about to turn to another topic. It is here that al-Biqā'ī chose to include Bible selections about Jesus. Al-Biqā'ī says that he will include *ḥikam* (wisdom sayings) of Jesus in addition to narratives about Jesus' birth and his miracles.⁵⁹⁹ But al-Biqā'ī's Biblical selections do not contain many utterances of Jesus. Al-Biqā'ī begins with the birth narratives, first summarizing Matthew's version.⁶⁰⁰ Relying on Luke's Gospel, al-Biqā'ī

⁵⁹⁶ Walid Saleh, *In Defense of the Bible: A Critical Edition and an Introduction to al-Biqā'ī's Bible Treatise* (Leiden: Brill, 2008) pp. 23-24; al-Biqā'ī, *Naẓm al-durar fī tanāsub al-āyāt wa-l-suwar* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīyah, 2006).

⁵⁹⁷ Saleh, *Defense of the Bible*, p. 23.

⁵⁹⁸ See al-Biqā'ī, *Naẓm al-durar fī tanāsub al-āyāt wa-l-suwar* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīyah, 2006) vol. 2, p. 90.

⁵⁹⁹ Al-Biqā'ī, vol. 2, p. 102.

⁶⁰⁰ Al-Biqā'ī's summary of Matthew's Gospel reveals a variance the investigation of whose origins would take us beyond the scope of the present study. Matthew's Gospel says that Mary had conceived before she and Joseph came together. But according to al-Biqā'ī (vol. 2, p. 102) she conceived before they separated (*yaftariqā*). Elsewhere, in his exegesis, however, al-Biqā'ī is certain of the virginal conception, such as in reference to Qur'ān 19:18.

continues with Jesus' presentation at the temple and returns to Matthew for the visit of the Magi and the story of the slaughter of the innocents. Only when al-Biqā'ī recounts Luke's account of Jesus in the temple at twelve years old do we learn of the lad's astounding wisdom.⁶⁰¹ But here Jesus merely says to Mary and Joseph, "Do you not know that it is appropriate for me to be busy with that which belongs to my father?"⁶⁰² Thus al-Biqā'ī has omitted the non-canonical stories about Jesus' schooldays. This is an understandable omission given that al-Biqā'ī's aim is to summarize the Gospel traditions.

Al-Biqā'ī then recounts the baptism and the wilderness experience of Jesus moving through the Synoptic Gospels in their canonical order.⁶⁰³ He proceeds with Luke's narrative until Jesus reads from the scroll of Isaiah in the synagogue at Nazareth.⁶⁰⁴ Then al-Biqā'ī caps the Gospel harmony he has thus created with a summation of Jesus' speech in John 5:31-47. In that speech, Jesus reproves his co-religionists. He says that they rejected him despite Moses' prophecies about him, John the Baptizer's testimony about him, and the signs he himself had performed in their midst.⁶⁰⁵ Even here, however, Jesus' speech is not the type of material we have identified as wisdom sayings—the sort of which al-Suyūṭī has reported of Solomon and Luqmān. The distinction will become more evident below as we explore examples of Jesus' wisdom sayings in *al-Durr*.

⁶⁰¹ Al-Biqā'ī, vol. 2, pp. 104-5.

⁶⁰² Al-Biqā'ī, vol. 2, p. 105.

⁶⁰³ Al-Biqā'ī, vol. 2, p. 104.

⁶⁰⁴ Luke 4:17; al-Biqā'ī, vol. 2, p. 105.

⁶⁰⁵ Al-Biqā'ī, vol. 2, p. 106.

Al-Biqā'ī's appropriation of the Gospel material nevertheless influenced al-Suyūṭī's work. Elsewhere, al-Suyūṭī had acknowledged his use of al-Biqā'ī's exegesis.⁶⁰⁶ Here too, some influence is evident. Al-Biqā'ī said that he will be presenting the *ḥikam* of Jesus, but he did not. Al-Suyūṭī noticed the lacuna and decided to fill it not with the Gospel extracts which al-Biqā'ī included here or elsewhere, but with Muslim traditions. As we have seen in the previous chapter of the present study, al-Suyūṭī placed the sayings of Jesus under the following caption in *al-Durr*: "A mention of snippets of the wisdom (*ḥikam*) of Jesus on whom be peace."⁶⁰⁷ As was already seen, al-Suyūṭī derived the wording of that caption from the caption which al-Ṭabrisī's placed above the wisdom sayings of Luqmān.⁶⁰⁸ Al-Biqā'ī had similarly placed a caption above the Gospel excerpts which he included in his exegesis of Qur'ān 2:253. Al-Biqā'ī's caption reads: "A mention of some of Jesus' clear teachings (*bayyināt*), his wisdom sayings (*ḥikam*) and his signs (*āyāt*)."⁶⁰⁹ The precise words of al-Suyūṭī's caption are more congruent with those of al-Ṭabrisī than of al-Biqā'ī. But it is al-Biqā'ī who inspired al-Suyūṭī to include a large number of wisdom sayings of Jesus in a separately captioned section of his exegesis.

In short, notwithstanding al-Biqā'ī's bold innovations, al-Suyūṭī's exegesis of Qur'ān 3:48 (on Jesus' wisdom) is distinctive due to two features. The first feature is al-Suyūṭī's inclusion of the story about Jesus' verbal joust with his schoolteacher. The

⁶⁰⁶ See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, ed. Sa'īd al-Mandūh (Beirut: Mu'assat al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyah, n. d.) 4 vols., vol. 3, p. 288.

⁶⁰⁷ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, p. 48.

⁶⁰⁸ See above, Chapter 4. For a study of al-Ṭabrisī's tafsir see Bruce Fudge, *Qur'ānic Hermeneutics: al-Ṭabrisī and the craft of commentary* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

⁶⁰⁹ Al-Biqā'ī, vol. 1, p. 487.

second feature is al-Suyūṭī's inclusion of Jesus' wisdom sayings. I introduce some of these sayings below. Moreover, I will address the implications of the inclusion of such sayings in *al-Durr* as an exegetical work. I turn now to al-Suyūṭī's special presentation of Jesus in terms of the story about his childhood.

5.2 The Christ Child and Allegorical Exegesis

With reference to Qur'ān 3:48 (on Jesus' wisdom), the Ṣūfī *tafsīrs* do not contain the legend depicting the Christ Child as an esoteric exegete.⁶¹⁰ That the Ṣūfī exegetes have omitted the story will be clear from the following survey. Al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) offers no comment.⁶¹¹ Al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021) likewise offers no comment either in his *Ḥaqā'iq al-tafsīr* or in his additions to that work.⁶¹² Al-Tha'labī first gives a note on an alternative reading of Qur'ān 3:48 before discussing its meaning.⁶¹³ The word *yu'allimuhū* (he will teach him) implying that God will teach Jesus, can also be read *nu'allimuhū* (we will teach him).⁶¹⁴ Citing the arguments in favour of each, al-Tha'labī shows that both readings have the same effect. The first reading presumes a continuation of the speech of the angels from the preceding verse. In that case, God is referred to in the

⁶¹⁰ For an introduction to the principal Ṣūfī tafsirs, see Sands, pp. 67-78.

⁶¹¹ See <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=3&tTafsirNo=29&tSoraNo=3&tAyahNo=48&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1> accessed November 12, 2011.

⁶¹² Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā'iq al-tafsīr* (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 2001) vol. 1, p. 100; *The Minor Qur'ān Commentary of Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn as-Sulamī* (d. 412/1021), ed. Gerhard Bowering (Beirut: Dar El-Machreq, 1997) p. 26.

⁶¹³ I include al-Tha'labī here because, following Sands, I include al-Naysābūrī (see below); and, at least with reference to the allegorical interpretation of the alphabet, al-Tha'labī is more Ṣūfī than al-Naysābūrī. On the mystical side of al-Tha'labī's exegesis see Saleh, *Formation*, pp. 151-61.

⁶¹⁴ Al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-'ilmīyah, 2004) vol. 2, p. 61.

third person. The second reading refers back to Qur'ān 3:44 where God speaks in the first person.⁶¹⁵ In sum, on one reading God said that he will teach Jesus; and on the other reading the angels said that God will teach Jesus. To al-Tha'labī, the difference between the two readings is insignificant.

As for the mention, in Qur'ān 3:48, that God will teach Jesus *al-kitāb* (the Scripture) and *al-ḥikmah* (wisdom), al-Tha'labī adds that God will teach Jesus the art of writing, and knowledge.⁶¹⁶ Al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) skips over Qur'ān 3:48.⁶¹⁷ Rūzbahān al-Baqlī (d. 606/1209) is similarly silent.⁶¹⁸

Najm al-Dīn al-Kubrā (d. 618/1221) offers a combined commentary on Qur'ān 3:48 and the subsequent verse, Qur'ān 3:49, which outlines some of Jesus' miracles. He writes that God taught Jesus without an intermediary, as he had taught Ādam.⁶¹⁹ Najm al-Dīn adds:

God equips human spirits with knowledge and wisdom and the ability to read and write so that they may be his vicegerents on earth. As God's vicegerent, the human spirit is the receptor of God's attributes, even power over creation, life, healing, and the disclosure of divine secrets. But the lights of these attributes become veiled from the heart of that soul which is born of the desires of parents.⁶²⁰

Najm al-Dīn then alludes to the belief that God extracted all human beings from the loins of the primordial Ādam. According to this belief, God saw to it that all human

⁶¹⁵ Al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf*, vol. 2, p. 61.

⁶¹⁶ Al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf*, vol. 2, p. 61.

⁶¹⁷ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* (Cairo: Dār al-Kātib al-'Arabī, 1968) vol. 1, p. 256.

⁶¹⁸ Rūzbahān al-Baqlī, *'Arā'is al-Bayān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub, 2008) vol. 1, pp. 150-51.

⁶¹⁹ Najm al-Dīn al-Kubrā, *al-Ta'wīlāt al-Najmīyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub, 2009) vol. 2, p. 38; he alludes to Qur'ān 2:31.

⁶²⁰ Najm al-Dīn al-Kubrā, vol. 2, p. 38.

beings committed themselves to a monotheistic faith. Then God sent them back to their seminal state to await their eventual birth.⁶²¹ Najm al-Dīn continues:

But God loved Jesus too much to put him back with the rest. That seed was eventually cast into Mary, with the result that Jesus was born without being tainted by the darkness of desires that comes from the meeting of two parents. Hence he was called the Spirit of God (*rūhullāh*), for he was the receptor of the lights of the attributes from the beginning of his existence and during his childhood. He thus spoke in the cradle and in his maturity; and he read and wrote the Torah and the Gospel without being taught. Moreover, he created the likeness of a bird's body from clay and healed the blind and the leper and gave life to the dead by God's leave.⁶²²

In that passage, Najm al-Dīn recognises Jesus' special spiritual status in a manner that only the Ṣūfī exegetes could have done.⁶²³ Al-Suyūṭī could hardly be expected to match such mystical exegesis. Whatever he wanted to say he was determined to say only by means of traditions, and, as already indicated, Ṣūfism remained on the periphery of the mainstream exegetical tradition. However, whereas Najm al-Dīn acknowledged Jesus' unmediated receipt of divine knowledge and wisdom, he mentioned neither the story of Jesus' schooldays nor the wisdom sayings of the adult Jesus.

Al-Qummī al-Naysābūrī (d. 728/1327) begins his exegesis of the verse, as is his manner, by first elucidating its exoteric aspects. Thus he explains the two readings as al-

⁶²¹ For more on this belief, see the commentaries on Qur'ān 7:172.

⁶²² Najm al-Dīn al-Kubrā, vol. 2, p. 39.

⁶²³ Ibn al-ʿArabī gives a different explanation for Jesus' powers. Jesus was born of the water of his mother and the breath of Gabriel which is, as are human exhalations, necessarily moist. It is the angelic breath in Jesus that makes his miracles possible. See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, trans. R.W.J. Austin (London: SPCK, 1980) pp. 175-76.

Tha'labī has done, and as we have seen above.⁶²⁴ More to the object of our quest, al-

Naysābūrī explains that, according to Qur'ān 3:48, God will teach Jesus four subjects:

The first of these is *al-kitāb*, by which *al-khatt* (handwriting) is intended. The second is *al-ḥikmah* (wisdom). This is so that Jesus will know the truth as it is, and that he will know what is good for the purpose of acting accordingly. The third is the Torah, since the search for the secrets of the divine scripture is not possible except after one is familiar with the five sciences. The fourth is the Gospel. In the latter are the sciences which God has revealed specifically to Jesus, and with which God has honoured him. This is the farthest extent and the highest degree of knowledge, of understanding, and of the grasp of realities and the cognizance of intricacies.⁶²⁵

Al-Qāshānī (d. 730/1329) shows that God taught Jesus both the letter and the spirit of the Scriptures. In his commentary on Qur'ān 3:48, al-Qāshānī writes:

By way of divine instruction, God will teach Jesus the writing of the intellectual sciences, the wisdom of the Law, and the gnosis of the divine scriptures, of the Torah and the Gospel, that being the gnosis of the outward and inner aspects.⁶²⁶

Here too, Jesus is given an impressive resume. Yet none of the Ṣūfī exeges, surveyed above, give an account either of Jesus' verbal sparring with his purported teacher or of Jesus' wisdom sayings.

Having surveyed the major early and medieval Ṣūfī exeges, we turn now to al-Suyūṭī's account of Jesus at school. Al-Suyūṭī presents three traditions. To simplify reference to these traditions in this and other *tafsīrs*, I will label them as al-Suyūṭī's first to third traditions respectively. Al-Suyūṭī names Ibn al-Mundhir as his source for the first tradition leading back to the early exegete Sa'īd b. Jubayr (d. 95/714).⁶²⁷ Al-Suyūṭī adds

⁶²⁴ Nizām al-Dīn al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Ḥusayn al-Qummī al-Naysābūrī, *Ghara'ib al-qur'ān wa raghā'ib al-furqān* (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-'ilmīyah, 1996) vol. 2, pp. 158 and 164.

⁶²⁵ Al-Naysābūrī, vol. 2, p. 164.

⁶²⁶ Al-Qāshānī, *Tafsīr Ibn 'Arabī* (Beirut: Dar Sader, 2002) vol. 1, p. 90.

⁶²⁷ Ibn al-Mundhir, *Kitāb Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, pp. 204-5.

that his first tradition rests on an authentic (*saḥīḥ*) *isnād*. I will now summarize the story of Jesus as it is given in that tradition. When Jesus grew up (*tara'ra'a*) Mary brought him to an elementary school (*kuttāb*) and entrusted him to the teacher. The schoolteacher told him to say, “*Bismillāh* (in the name of God),” and Jesus complied. Then the teacher dictated, “*Al-Raḥmān* (the Merciful).”⁶²⁸ Surprisingly, the boy responded, “*Al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm* (the Merciful, the Compassionate).”⁶²⁹ The teacher then prompted Jesus to say, “*Abū Jād*.”⁶³⁰ But the lad, instead of following the prompt, asked his would-be instructor if he knew the meaning of the first letter, *alif*, in what he just dictated. When the teacher confessed his ignorance, Jesus explained that it stands for *ālā'* Allāh (God’s blessings).⁶³¹ Eliciting a confession of ignorance from the tutor on the meaning of each letter one after another, Jesus informs him that *bā'* indicates *bahā'* Allāh (the magnificence of God); *jīm* refers to *jalāl* Allāh (the splendour of God); and *lām* refers, again, to *ālā'* Allāh.⁶³² The teacher exclaimed, “How am I to teach one who is more learned than I am?” However,

⁶²⁸ As translated in Richard Bell, *The Qur'ān: Translated with a critical re-arrangement of the Surahs* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960) p. 1. Abdel Haleem translates, “Lord of Mercy” (see p. 3 where he justifies this translation in note ‘a’).

⁶²⁹ Jesus is thus shown to be familiar with the *basmalah*, i.e., the formula *bi-sm Allāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm* (In the Name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate) the recitation of which precedes each Qur’ānic *sūrah* except the ninth. That invocation, especially in its shorter form, comprising the first two words, is commonly uttered prior to good deeds large or small.

⁶³⁰ The two words used as a mnemonic, and here a pedagogic, device. These two words are constituted mainly from the initial letters of the names of the letters of the alphabet which were once arranged in the sequence *alif, bā', jīm, dāl*, etc., corresponding to the western Semitic system. See Georges Ifrah, *The Universal History of Numbers: From Prehistory to the Invention of the Computer*, trans. David Bellos et al (New York: John Wiley, 2000) pp. 242, 244.

⁶³¹ The phrase is found in Qur’ān 7:69 and 74. With *rabb* (Lord) substituted for *Allāh*, the phrase occurs in Qur’ān 53:55 and 55:13, and is repeated thirty other times in the same *sūrah*.

⁶³² This version of the story seems confused at this point, for the next letter in the usual sequence is *hā'* as is evident from the other versions of the narrative to follow. But both al-Suyūfī and Ibn al-Mundhir give the present version as shown.

Mary pleaded with him to at least let the boy sit with the other children. Placed among the children, Jesus seized the opportunity to inform them as to what their mothers had in store for them at home. The report thus alludes to Qur'ān 3:49.⁶³³

Al-Suyūṭī's second tradition is related on the authority of Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī, and Ibn Mas'ūd, two famous companions of Muḥammad. The tradition contains the added note that two companions of Muḥammad attributed the narrative to Muḥammad himself (*marfū'an*). Al-Suyūṭī names his sources as the traditionist Ibn 'Adī (d. 365/966-7) and the historian Ibn 'Asākir.⁶³⁴ I will now summarize this tradition while omitting some aspects of it that are already reflected in al-Suyūṭī's first tradition, as seen above. The unsuspecting teacher instructs Jesus to write 'In God's name.' But the pupil asked for an elucidation of that invocation. Thus the instructor had to admit his incapacity. Jesus then explained, as in the previous report, that *bā'* is the magnificence of God. It is significant, however, that in the present report Jesus is commenting on the letters as components of the *basmalah*, not simply as symbols of the alphabet. He continues, "*Sīn* is the resplendence of God (*sanā'* Allāh); *mīm* is his kingdom (*mamlakah*)." Having expounded each letter of the first word, Jesus then begins to assign meanings to the other three words of the *basmalah* as whole words: "Allāh is the God of the gods; *al-Raḥmān* is the Merciful One of the hereafter and of this world; and *al-Raḥīm* is the Compassionate One of the hereafter." Only after providing this exegesis of the *basmalah* did Jesus proceed to an elaboration of the letters of the alphabet in a manner similar to that of the

⁶³³ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, pp. 550-51.

⁶³⁴ See Ibn 'Adī, *al-Kāmil fī-l-ḍu'afā'* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub, 1997) in *al-Marjī'* flash disk, vol. 1, pp. 493-94; Ibn 'Asākir, *Tārikh Dimashq* in *al-Marjī'*, vol. 50, pp. 241ff.

previous narrative. Although he is anachronistically elucidating Arabic letters, he stops short at twenty-two letters thus betraying a prior notion, now lost in the narrative, that the context demands the Hebrew alphabet.⁶³⁵

Contrary to his custom, only at the end of that entertaining narrative does al-Suyūfī inform his readers that there is a problem with its authenticity. He now reproduces Ibn ‘Adī’s remark that this *ḥadīth* is false (*bāṭil*) in terms of its *isnād* (chain of transmitters). As if to compensate for this confession, al-Suyūfī declares that his next tradition is transmitted through another path, this one leading back to Ibn ‘Abbās, the preeminent exegete after Muḥammad.

Al-Suyūfī names the sources of his third tradition as Ishāq b. Bishr (d. 206/821) and Ibn ‘Asākir.⁶³⁶ Al-Suyūfī’s third tradition consists of two distinct parts. The first half of the tradition depicts Jesus as an esoteric exegete; the second half depicts Muḥammad also as an esoteric exegete. According to the first half of that tradition, after having spoken in the cradle, Jesus refrained from speaking again until he grew up considerably. Then God caused him to speak with wisdom and clarity (*bi-l-ḥikmah wa-l-bayān*). Prior to this, however, while Jesus was still being nursed by his mother, the Jews had continued to spread false rumours about him and his mother.⁶³⁷ Eventually, Jesus was weaned; hence he began to eat and drink. When he reached the age of seven, his mother consigned him to a tutor.

⁶³⁵ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, pp. 551-52.

⁶³⁶ For an introduction to Ishāq b. Bishr and his work see Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm* (Leiden: Brill, 1996) p. 13.

⁶³⁷ The report mentions Qur’ān 4:157 and alludes to Qur’ān 19:28. Both verses indicate something about Mary’s contemporaries questioning her chastity.

In this anecdote, after the coach confesses ignorance, the pupil asks, “How can you teach me what you do not know?” The teacher then requests a reversal of roles—now he wants Jesus to teach him. To make the reversal of roles complete, the child occupied the teacher’s position. The man had to now sit with the children and humbly ask Jesus for an explanation of the letters. The humbled teacher was then amazed to hear Jesus’ exposition of the alphabet, since Jesus was the first person to elucidate the alphabet in that manner.⁶³⁸

In the second half of al-Suyūṭī’s third tradition, Muḥammad is now the esoteric exegete. According to this part of the tradition, ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān (d. 35/655) asked the Messenger of God for an exegesis of *Abū Jād*.⁶³⁹ Muḥammad responded, “Know the *tafsīr* of *Abū Jād*, for it contains all of the wonders. Woe to the scholar who is ignorant of its *tafsīr*.” Muḥammad then proceeded to annotate the alphabet in the manner in which Jesus had done. However, the meanings which Muḥammad assigns to the letters are often different from those assigned by Jesus.⁶⁴⁰ Surprisingly, Muḥammad is also content with the exposition of only the twenty-two Semitic letters.⁶⁴¹

Al-Suyūṭī does not append any note questioning the authenticity of his third tradition. Thus al-Suyūṭī has introduced three traditions, but only expressed doubt about

⁶³⁸ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, pp. 552-53.

⁶³⁹ ‘Uthman would later become the third caliph.

⁶⁴⁰ The assigned meanings prove to be quite fluid from one tradition to another and from one Ṣūfī tafsīr to another. The only limitation is that whatever word is pegged on a letter must indicate some meaningful theology. Otherwise, a letter can indicate almost any dictionary entry that begins with it. Moreover, the letter in question does not need to begin the assigned word, but could be found within it. On this basis *lām* could indicate either *Allāh* or Gabriel—to mention only two meanings assigned to this letter in the literature.

⁶⁴¹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, pp. 553.

the authenticity of the second. In sum, al-Suyūṭī leaves with his readers two uncontested traditions espousing the said allegorical exegesis of the alphabet: his first and third traditions. Al-Suyūṭī's first tradition credits the esoteric exegesis to Jesus. And, al-Suyūṭī's third tradition credits the esoteric exegesis to both Jesus and Muḥammad.

In this way, al-Suyūṭī has accommodated a specifically Ṣūfī type of exegesis in *al-Durr*. This is despite the fact that *al-Durr* bears the formal features of tradition-based *tafsīrs*. In al-Suyūṭī's first tradition, which al-Suyūṭī declared authentic, Jesus knew the words of the *basmalah*. Yet in that narrative Jesus offered no *tafsīr* of the *basmalah*. However, it is to be noted that the second *ḥadīth*, which al-Suyūṭī has declared to be false, is the only one showing Jesus explicating the *basmalah*. Yet all is not lost. As we will presently see, al-Suyūṭī's third *ḥadīth* will nevertheless be used by him and others in the explication of the *basmalah* at the head of the Qur'ān's first chapter.

A comparison of the exegeses of the *basmalah* at Qur'ān 1:1 will show that whereas the tradition-based *tafsīrs* excluded this type of exegesis, the Ṣūfī works embraced it. Al-Ṭabarī presented, though in a summary form, the story of Jesus explicating the *basmalah*.⁶⁴² Al-Ṭabarī then voices his fears that this *ḥadīth* is the result of an error on the part of the *muḥaddith* (the *ḥadīth* compiler). According to al-Ṭabarī, it is possible that what Jesus intended to explicate are simply the letters as components of the alphabet, but not the letters as components of the *basmalah*. Al-Ṭabarī adds that the allegorical meaning thus attached to the *basmalah* is impossible. According to al-Ṭabarī, such an exegesis of the *basmalah* would make no sense either to Arabs in general or to

⁶⁴² Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 1, p. 63.

Arab linguists in particular.⁶⁴³ It is to be noted that the story of Jesus which al-Ṭabarī offered here in a summarized form is the same story found in the second of al-Suyūṭī's three traditions seen above. That is the very tradition which al-Suyūṭī declared to be inauthentic.

In his commentary on Qur'ān 1:1, Ibn Kathīr likewise mentioned the said narrative and voiced his misgivings about it. He writes: This is *gharīb jiddan* (very strange).⁶⁴⁴ He adds that it is possibly authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) as the words of someone of lesser authority than Muḥammad. In that case, Ibn Kathīr cautions, it should not even be considered *marfū'* (i.e. the sort of information which can be presumed to have been derived from Muḥammad even if not specifically attributed to him).⁶⁴⁵ Rather, it should be considered as being of Israelite origins. He concludes by deferring knowledge of the matter to God, as he normally does when he does not have a decisive proof of a *ḥadīth*'s presumed Israelite origins.⁶⁴⁶ But then, he quietly adds that Juwaybir, another narrator, has narrated a similar story on the authority of al-Ḍaḥḥāk.⁶⁴⁷ Ibn Kathīr made no further comment to specifically impugn this latter *sanad*.⁶⁴⁸ It is to be noted that this is the third

⁶⁴³ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 1, p. 63.

⁶⁴⁴ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 144.

⁶⁴⁵ Ibn Kathīr is caught in a dilemma. Normally, the tradition school prohibits personal opinion on matters that could only be known by divine revelation. If a companion of Muḥammad speaks of such matters, the school presumes that the information was obtained from Muḥammad although not ostensibly credited to him. Yet Ibn Kathīr finds the allegorical exegesis too abhorrent to credit to Muḥammad. His way out of the dilemma is to now presume that an Israelite tradition has been foisted upon an unsuspecting companion of the prophet.

⁶⁴⁶ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 144.

⁶⁴⁷ On the chain from Juwaybir to al-Ḍaḥḥāk see al-Suyūṭī *al-Itqān*, vol. 4, p. 498.

⁶⁴⁸ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 144.

of al-Suyūṭī's three traditions seen above. There I pointed out that the absence of any derogatory remark on the authenticity of the tradition indicates al-Suyūṭī's tacit approval of the tradition.⁶⁴⁹ As seen above, al-Ṭabarī was tolerant of the allegorical interpretation of the letters of the alphabet, though not when the same letters constitute the *basmalah*. Ibn Kathīr makes no such allowance here for the allegorical interpretation of letters—even when the letters are not being considered as constituents of the *basmalah*. Ibn Kathīr therefore dealt with the two chains of narrators together as though the *ḥadīths* they support are similar. Yet only one of these *ḥadīths* spoke of the exegesis of the *basmalah*. Ibn Kathīr obviously realised that the meaning assigned to each letter of the alphabet in such exegesis is intended to hold even when those letters combine to form the *basmalah*.

At this point in his exegesis of Qur'ān 1:1, al-Suyūṭī followed Ibn Kathīr closely. He thus reproduces, in the same order, the impeached tradition and its alternate chain of transmission. He agreed that the first chain is “very weak.” But he said nothing about the authenticity of the second chain.⁶⁵⁰ Ibn Kathīr had left his readers with two *ḥadīths*: the authenticity of one is dubious; and the authenticity of the other is undeclared. Al-Suyūṭī did not leave the matter there. When he came to explicate Qur'ān 3:48 (on Jesus' wisdom), he made these two traditions his second and third respectively. By this time al-

⁶⁴⁹ In his *Itqān*, and also in a postscript to *al-Durr*, al-Suyūṭī describes the chain from Juwaybir to al-Ḍaḥḥāk as being extremely weak (see n. 66 above and *al-Durr*, vol. 15, p. 821). See also Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-'Ujāb fī bayān al-asbāb* ed. Fawwāz Aḥmad Zamarlī (Beirut: Dar ibn Ḥazm, 2002) pp. 59-60. But we will see below that al-Suyūṭī has found another route to al-Ḍaḥḥāk. What is most important here is the impression al-Suyūṭī leaves with readers of *al-Durr*. Most readers are unlikely to consult his postscript. For, there is no earlier indication of its existence, and such postscripts are not common in the exegetical works. Moreover, within that postscript, the section addressing the authenticity of traditions is not clearly set off from the surrounding material. Only the most determined reader will find al-Suyūṭī's comments there. Fewer readers are likely to consult his similar comments in the *Itqān*.

⁶⁵⁰ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 1, pp. 38-39.

Suyūṭī had in his arsenal yet another tradition, which he placed first and declared authentic. He placed the *ḥadīth* of dubious authenticity second, and declared it decisively false.

Al-Suyūṭī's now places the *ḥadīth* of undeclared authenticity as his third tradition. His treatment of that tradition is interesting. By the time he came to write his commentary on 3:48, al-Suyūṭī had found another reporter transmitting from al-Ḍaḥḥāk, on whose authority that tradition was related. More importantly, al-Suyūṭī managed to discover that al-Ḍaḥḥāk is a mere transmitter of the *ḥadīth*. Al-Suyūṭī found a report in which the story of Jesus is relayed through al-Ḍaḥḥāk but on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās.⁶⁵¹ Al-Suyūṭī has thus shored up the *ḥadīth* by attributing it to an authority two generations earlier than the authority to whom Ibn Kathīr had attributed the same *ḥadīth*. Al-Suyūṭī still says nothing final about the authenticity of his third tradition, but such is the way he leaves the vast majority of *ḥadīths* in his work. Al-Suyūṭī's interest in this particular *ḥadīth* is so strong, however, that in his exegesis of Qur'ān 23:50 he reproduces the first half of that same *ḥadīth*. As was seen above, the first half of that *ḥadīth* shows Jesus elucidating the letters of the alphabet.⁶⁵² In sum, al-Suyūṭī, equipped with his first and third *ḥadīths*, confidently highlights the special role of Jesus as the first person to have offered a *tafsīr* of the letters of the alphabet by way of allusion (*ishārah*).

We turn now to the Ṣūfī *tafsīrs* and their treatment of the *basmalah* at Qur'ān 1:1. Except for al-Naysābūrī, all of the Ṣūfī exegetes mentioned above assign interpretations

⁶⁵¹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, pp. 552.

⁶⁵² Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 10, pp. 590-91.

to the letters of the *basmalah*.⁶⁵³ Yet only a few of these exegetes credit the said interpretations to Jesus. In his exegesis of the *basmalah*, al-Tustarī wrote that the letter *bā* indicates the magnificence of God and the letter *sīn* indicates the resplendence of God. Thus al-Tustarī exhibits an exegesis similar to that which we have seen attributed to Jesus and Muḥammad above.⁶⁵⁴ Yet al-Tustarī fails to attribute that exegesis to either Jesus or Muḥammad. Al-Sulamī cites a *ḥadīth* showing that Muḥammad, though not Jesus, explicated the first word of the *basmalah* by way of allusion. But al-Sulamī prefaced that attribution to Muḥammad with the conditional phrase, “if this is correct (*in ṣaḥḥa ḥādihā*).” Thus al-Sulamī expressed doubt about the authenticity of that tradition.⁶⁵⁵ Al-Qushayrī attributes the exegesis of the *basmalah* to neither Jesus nor Muḥammad.⁶⁵⁶ Rūzbahān al-Baqlī, reproducing the *ḥadīth* mentioned by al-Sulamī above, attributes the

⁶⁵³ Whereas al-Naysābūrī has not mentioned this specific type of exegesis with reference to the *basmalah*, elsewhere in his exegesis he welcomes exegesis by way of allusion. For example, he writes, “The *alḥ al-ishārah* (those who interpret by way of allusion) say, ‘The *bā*’ is a lowly letter in terms of its grapheme; yet when it is attached to the word Allāh it is raised and exalted. Hence it is not difficult to see that the heart which is attached to the presence of Allāh is raised in terms of its position and importance.” See al-Naysābūrī, vol. 1, p. 63. Al-Naysābūrī, includes another story showing that Jesus, in his adult years, passes by the grave of a person whose punishment, merited by sins, is waived due to the fact that the sinner’s son had learnt the *basmalah* at school and is now still reciting it (al-Naysābūrī, vol. 1, p. 81). But this latter story is neither about Jesus’ school days nor about esoteric exegesis.

⁶⁵⁴ See <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=3&tTafsirNo=29&tSoraNo=1&tAyahNo=1&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1> accessed November 15, 2011. For other letters al-Tustarī applies meanings varied from those applied in the reports about Jesus. But we have already seen such variation among the reports about Jesus. The point here is not about the specific meanings applied, but the type of exegesis offered.

⁶⁵⁵ Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā’iq al-tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 25. Likewise in al-Sulamī’s minor commentary (see p. 4).

⁶⁵⁶ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 1, p. 256.

exegesis to Muḥammad. However, Rūzbahān did not express any doubt regarding the *ḥadīth*'s authenticity.⁶⁵⁷

Only three of the above Ṣūfī exegeses attribute the allegorical exegesis of the letters of the *basmalah* to Jesus. Al-Qāshānī credits such exegesis to Jesus in the most general manner possible without mention of Jesus' words.⁶⁵⁸ This broad reference was convenient for the exegete. Otherwise, the exegesis which al-Qāshānī calls on Jesus to support here is unconnected to the meanings which Jesus saw in the letters—if we are to judge by the traditions we have seen above. Al-Qāshānī writes that the *bā*' of the *basmalah* indicates the First Intellect, God's first creation, whom God addressed with this letter.⁶⁵⁹ According to al-Qāshānī, God said to the First Intellect, “With you (*bika*) I give, with you I take, with you I reward, and with you I punish.”⁶⁶⁰

Both al-Tha'labī and Najm al-Dīn al-Kubrā mention al-Suyūfī's second *ḥadīth* in a summary form. But neither al-Tha'labī nor Najm al-Dīn makes any reference to the *ḥadīth*'s lack of authenticity.⁶⁶¹ Although al-Qurṭubī often copies into his exegesis traditions from al-Tha'labī's *tafsīr*, al-Qurṭubī did not reproduce the *ḥadīth* in question.⁶⁶² In his exegesis of the *basmalah*, al-Qurṭubī reproduced a *ḥadīth* crediting the exegesis to

⁶⁵⁷ Rūzbahān al-Baqlī, *'Arā'is al-Bayān*, vol. 1, p. 15.

⁶⁵⁸ Al-Qāshānī vol. 1, p. 7.

⁶⁵⁹ On the First Intellect, see Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 2nd edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983) p. 325.

⁶⁶⁰ Al-Qāshānī vol. 1, p. 7.

⁶⁶¹ Al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*, vol. 1, p. 23; Najm al-Dīn al-Kubrā, *al-Ta'wīlāt al-Najmīyah*, vol. 1, p. 63.

⁶⁶² On Al-Tha'labī's influence on al-Qurṭubī see Saleh, *Formation*, p. 154.

Muḥammad but not to Jesus.⁶⁶³ That is the same *ḥadīth* which would later become the second half of al-Suyūṭī's third tradition, as was seen above.

It is thus clear that only three of the Ṣūfīs *tafsīrs* credit Jesus with the favoured mystical exegesis of the letters of the *basmalah*. Moreover, those Ṣūfī exegetes who credit Jesus with this sort of exegesis do so on the basis of al-Suyūṭī's second *ḥadīth* which has been discredited by the tradition-critics. The tradition-based *tafsīrs*, as we have seen, mention al-Suyūṭī's second *ḥadīth* only to discredit it.⁶⁶⁴ Ibn Kathīr could not discredit al-Suyūṭī's third *ḥadīth*, so he mentioned it quietly. Except for the work of Ibn al-Mundhir, none of the *tafsīrs* considered above, Ṣūfī or otherwise, mention al-Suyūṭī's first *ḥadīth* which he declared authentic. In sum, the Ṣūfī exegetes failed to capitalize on al-Suyūṭī's first and third traditions.

The Ṣūfī exegetes likewise offer esoteric exegeses in their discussion of the disjointed letters (*hurūf muqaṭṭa'āt*) at Qur'ān 2:1. Yet, again, they fail to credit Jesus as the first interpreter of the alphabet.⁶⁶⁵ As for tradition-based interpreters, most of them are averse to allusive exegeses of the letters of the *basmalah*. Yet most of them show tolerance for such exegeses of the disjointed letters. In three such *tafsīrs*, those of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, and Ibn Kathīr, we find a *ḥadīth* associating Jesus with the

⁶⁶³ Al-Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub, 2000) vol. 1, p. 75.

⁶⁶⁴ It should be noted that, in reference to Qur'ān 19:31, al-Rāzī mentioned a *ḥadīth* bearing much similarity to al-Suyūṭī's third, though now related through al-Ḥasan. This too is attributed to Muḥammad. See al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* (Dār Iḥyā al-Turāth, 2001) vol. 7, p. 535. The *ḥadīth* is found in al-Wāqidī, *Futūḥ al-Shām*, in *al-Marjī* flash disk. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ra'ūf mentioned a shorter form of the same *ḥadīth* labelling it as *mursal* since al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, instead of naming his immediate informer, attributed the statement directly to Muḥammad. See Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ra'ūf, *Fayḍ al-Qadīr* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub, 1994) in *al-Marjī* flash disk, vol. 4, p. 660.

⁶⁶⁵ Al-Naysābūrī accepts that the disjointed letters at Qur'ān 1:1 represent words, and offers the most comprehensive discussion of the various meanings, crediting one such specifically to an unnamed Ṣūfī. See al-Naysābūrī, vol. 1, pp. 131-32.

exposition of the alphabet.⁶⁶⁶ According to that *ḥadīth*, the letter *alif* is the key to the name Allāh; the letter *lām* is the key to the name al-Laṭīf (the Sublime); and the letter *mīm* is the key to the name al-Majīd (the Glorious One).

Al-Suyūṭī's version of the same *ḥadīth* retains the esoteric exegesis but omits mention of Jesus.⁶⁶⁷ Hence, on the surface, al-Suyūṭī seems to have omitted something significant with respect to our investigation. Hence my observation of al-Suyūṭī's superlative emphasis on Jesus in the foregoing discussion appears to be slightly mitigated here. However, a closer look at the *ḥadīth* in question is warranted. In the edition of al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr* which I have consulted, the editors have bracketed what they consider to be the words of Jesus which are cited in that *ḥadīth*.⁶⁶⁸ The exegesis of the disjointed letters falls outside of the brackets. In that edition, Jesus merely says, "How astonishing it is that they utter the names of God, and live on his provisions, and yet disbelieve in him." If the editors are correct, then this statement of Jesus, which al-Suyūṭī has omitted, has no bearing on the exegesis of the disjointed letters.

It is clear that al-Suyūṭī construed the said *ḥadīth* in the same way in which the modern editors of al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr* would later construe it. Al-Suyūṭī considered the esoteric exegesis mentioned in that *ḥadīth* as being that of the narrator, al-Rabī' b. Anas, and not of Jesus. Of course, once the narrator has inserted Jesus' above short saying into

⁶⁶⁶ Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān: Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, ed. Maḥmūd Shākir al-Ḥīstanī and 'Alī 'Āshūr (Beirut: Iḥya al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 2001) vol. 1, pp. 102-103; Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr Ibn Abī Ḥātim* (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob Al-Ilmiya, 2006) 7 vols., vol. 1, pp. 24-25; Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 176.

⁶⁶⁷ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 1, p. 127.

⁶⁶⁸ Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān: Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, ed. Maḥmūd Shākir al-Ḥīstanī and 'Alī 'Āshūr (Beirut: Iḥya al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 2001) vol. 1, pp. 102-103.

that *ḥadīth*, the result is that Jesus' saying appears to support the narrator's exegesis. Jesus' saying would then seem to mean that people are actually uttering the names of God when they recite letters of the alphabet such as those found at Qur'ān 2:1.

By justifiably removing Jesus' saying from that tradition, al-Suyūṭī has thus separated it once more from the saying of the narrator. Al-Suyūṭī thus avoided giving an unwarranted meaning to Jesus' saying. Al-Suyūṭī's warrant for construing the esoteric exegesis in that tradition to be that of al-Rabī' comes from another tradition which al-Suyūṭī derived from the early exegete 'Abd b. Ḥumayd. Al-Suyūṭī mentioned this tradition as well in his exegesis of Qur'ān 2:1.⁶⁶⁹ In this latter tradition, we find the same esoteric exegesis of the disjointed letters which al-Rabī' credited to Jesus in the other tradition above. However, in the present tradition al-Rabī' does not mention Jesus. Rather, the esoteric exegesis which al-Rabī' mentions here is clearly his own. It is now clear that al-Suyūṭī did not omit anything significant from the other tradition seen above. Rather, by removing the mention of Jesus from that tradition, al-Suyūṭī has clarified the tradition.

Several general conclusions are clear from the evidence amassed above. First, al-Suyūṭī alone of all the foregoing *tafsīrs* includes at Qur'ān 3:48 the story of Jesus at school explicating the alphabet. The dominant nature of al-Suyūṭī's three lengthy narratives at that location serves to emphasize the significance of Jesus and his exegesis. By way of contrast, other exegeses contain only isolated references to Jesus. Second, Ibn al-Mundhir's first *ḥadīth*, which showed Jesus explicating the alphabet, was neglected for centuries. Al-Suyūṭī reintroduced that *ḥadīth* into the exegetical stream and declared it

⁶⁶⁹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 1, p. 122.

authentic. My purpose here is not to judge al-Suyūṭī's valuation of the *ḥadīth*. My point is that by means of this *ḥadīth* al-Suyūṭī obviously wanted to convince his readers of the authenticity of the story. Third, al-Suyūṭī built on the strength of his third tradition. The two prime examples of tradition-based exegeses, those of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr, impugned al-Suyūṭī's second *ḥadīth*. But Ibn Kathīr, unable to impugn al-Suyūṭī's third *ḥadīth*, mentioned it without appending a comment. Meanwhile, al-Suyūṭī shored up that third *ḥadīth* by finding another path of transmission. He traced the chain of authorities all the way back to Ibn 'Abbās. Fourth, al-Suyūṭī repeated the first part of his third *ḥadīth* in his exegesis of Qur'ān 23:50 thus highlighting Jesus again as the pioneer of the allegorical exegesis of the alphabet.⁶⁷⁰ Fifth, whereas Ṣūfī exegetes thrive on such allusive exegesis, many fail to attribute the exegesis to Jesus. Rather, some rely on the second part of al-Suyūṭī's third *ḥadīth* to credit the exegesis to Muḥammad. On the other hand, those who do give credit to Jesus base the attribution on al-Suyūṭī's second *ḥadīth* which the tradition-critics easily dispense with. Al-Suyūṭī, however, himself a master of tradition, sourced out traditions whose authenticity the critics will have difficulty discounting. Thus he established Jesus as the pioneer esoteric exegete of the letters of the alphabet. In sum, although *al-Durr* bears the appearance of a tradition-based *tafsīr*, it nevertheless incorporates Ṣūfī *tafsīr* where such *tafsīr* can be supported by traditions.

It remains for us to see if al-Suyūṭī managed to influence later exegetes with regards to the story of Jesus and his esoteric exegesis. As usual, al-Shawkānī is clearly dependent on al-Suyūṭī. Yet in his exegesis of Qur'ān 3:48 he avoided copying the

⁶⁷⁰ A perusal of many *tafsīrs* at Qur'ān 23:50 reveals that al-Suyūṭī is outstanding for his inclusion of the said *ḥadīth* here as well.

traditions about Jesus at school.⁶⁷¹ In his exegesis of Qur’ān 1:1, al-Shawkānī first impugned al-Suyūṭī’s second *ḥadīth*, then he mentioned the *ḥadīth*, then he berated it some more.⁶⁷² That *ḥadīth* is, of course, the same one which al-Suyūṭī himself had already declared inauthentic. As for al-Suyūṭī’s third *ḥadīth*, we had seen above that Ibn Kathīr mentioned it quietly. Al-Shawkānī did not mention it at all. Likewise, he fails to mention al-Suyūṭī’s first *ḥadīth*. Al-Shawkānī is clearly averse to exegesis by way of allusion to the alphabet. His aversion to this sort of exegesis can be seen again from his *tafsīr* of Qur’ān 2:1. This explains al-Shawkānī’s reticence in relating the two traditions which al-Suyūṭī deemed reliable: his first and third traditions.⁶⁷³ Al-Shawkānī omitted the traditions that have some merit and focused on the one he could berate.

On the other hand, al-Ālūsī took al-Suyūṭī’s first and third traditions, interweaved them into a single narrative, and included the combined narrative in his exegesis of Qur’ān 3:48. He writes that the *ḥadīths* behind the combined narrative support each other and that the account is authentic (*qad ṣaḥḥ*).⁶⁷⁴ Although al-Ālūsī made no reference to al-Suyūṭī as his source for these traditions, it is nevertheless clear that al-Suyūṭī is his source. Hence al-Suyūṭī has succeeded in convincing at least one major exegete to approvingly cite the story of Jesus at school. Nonetheless, al-Ālūsī did not complete the story to the point of having Jesus elucidate the alphabet. Rather, al-Ālūsī summarized the story by merely adding that Jesus voiced in advance whatever his would-be teacher had

⁶⁷¹ Al-Shawkānī, p. 286.

⁶⁷² Al-Shawkānī, p. 42.

⁶⁷³ Al-Shawkānī, p. 54.

⁶⁷⁴ Al-Ālūsī, vol. 2, p. 202.

in mind to teach him. Hence al-Ālūsī shows that Jesus was wise as a child. But al-Ālūsī does not show that Jesus espoused esoteric exegesis.

Al-Ālūsī's stated conclusion from the story indicates the bare minimum he intended to prove with his interweaved summary of the two traditions: "This supports the belief that Jesus' knowledge was pure, and that it was divinely bestowed."⁶⁷⁵ Having used a part of the story to prove that Jesus was the unschooled teacher of the schoolteacher, al-Ālūsī had no interest in the rest of the story. Neither did al-Ālūsī acknowledge the existence of the story in his exegesis of Qur'ān 1:1 and 2:1. In sum, al-Suyūṭī's influence on al-Ālūsī was limited. For, although al-Ālūsī announced his confidence in the soundness of the two traditions, he avoided reproducing that part of the story which shows Jesus explicating the alphabet.

5.3 The Wisdom of the Ascetic Jesus

Ṣūfīs have seen Jesus as a model ascetic.⁶⁷⁶ Hence, as a Ṣūfī, al-Suyūṭī is genuinely interested in the figure of Christ. In one of the snippets which al-Suyūṭī reproduces, al-Ḥasan (d. 110/728) declares that Jesus will be the leader of the ascetics (*ra's al-zāhidīn*) on the day of judgement, and that those who flee for the sake of their religion will be gathered with Jesus on that fateful day.⁶⁷⁷ As noted by Tarif Khalidi, the

⁶⁷⁵ Al-Ālūsī, vol. 2, p. 202.

⁶⁷⁶ Neal Robinson writes that the proto-Ṣūfīs of the Umayyad and early Abbasid periods, more ascetics than mystics, saw Jesus as "a model wayfaring ascetic." Neal Robinson, *Christ*, p. 53.

⁶⁷⁷ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, p. 565. Ibn 'Asākir, *Tārīkh Dimashq* (Beirut: Dār Ihyā al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 2003) 80 vols., vol. 50, p. 51, in *al-Marjī'* flash disk. The significance of the early authority cited for this recognition of Jesus is that al-Ḥasan himself was a paradigm of asceticism. See Suleiman Ali Mourad, *Early Islam between Myth and History: Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110H/728CE) and the formation of his legacy in classical Islamic scholarship* (Leiden: Brill, 2006) p. 61. Those who flee for the sake of their religion (*al-farrārūn bi-dīnihim*) would be those who flee from oppression or choose simply to avoid

great Ṣūfī master Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240) regarded Jesus as the Seal of the Saints (*khātam al-awliyā’*).⁶⁷⁸ Of course Ibn ‘Arabī considered himself the seal of the Muḥammadan sainthood.⁶⁷⁹ But, as Andreas d’Souza explained, Ibn ‘Arabī had declared in his *Kitāb al-futūhāt al-makkīyah* that there is also a universal sainthood; and Jesus is the seal of the universal sainthood (*khātam al-walāyah al-muṭlaqah*).⁶⁸⁰

Al-Ḥasan’s estimation of the status of Jesus is explained by the accompanying anecdote in the same tradition. Al-Ḥasan reports that Satan once passed by Jesus while the latter, using a stone as a pillow, was enjoying his sleep. Satan sneered at him, “Did you not say that you want nothing of the comforts of this world? What of this stone which is a part of the world?” Jesus got up, tossed the stone towards him, and said, “This is yours along with the world.”⁶⁸¹ Many of the other sayings show Jesus to be deliberately homeless, and, moreover, that he remained single and childless.⁶⁸² Several of these traditions speak against love for the world. For example, Jesus says, “The root of every

society for the sake of maintaining their faith. The reading in Ibn ‘Asākir is, “Those who flee with their sins (*al-farrārūn bi-dhunūbihim*).”

⁶⁷⁸ Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), pp. 41-42.

⁶⁷⁹ See Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn ‘Arabī*, trans. Liadain Sherrard (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993).

⁶⁸⁰ Andreas d’Souza, “Jesus in Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*,” in *Islamochristiana* 8 (1982), 185-200, citing *Kitāb al-futūhāt al-makkīyah* (no pub. no date) 4 vols., vol. 2, p. 64. See also Gerald T. Elmore, *Islamic Sainthood in the Fullness of Time: Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Book of the Fabulous Gryphon* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), p. 144.

⁶⁸¹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, p. 565.

⁶⁸² Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, pp. 565-66.

sin is the love of the world; and many a desire results in prolonged sorrow for the covetous.⁶⁸³

It would be beyond our scope here to adumbrate the remaining sayings. The bulk of them support ascetic themes: quietude, patience, charity, poverty, faith, remembrance of death, and the intensity of worship. These themes are of intense interest to Ṣūfīs in general and to al-Suyūṭī in particular. Jesus' pronouncements on these themes and his complete abandonment of the world's comforts naturally position him, for Ṣūfīs, as the ascetic par excellence. Such a high level of interest in Jesus and his sayings distinguishes *al-Durr* not only from other *tafsīrs* of the tradition-based genre, but also from every other exegesis of the Qur'ān. I could find no other exegesis to include the sayings of Jesus in response to Qur'ān 3:48; and it is unlikely that another *tafsīr* contains a conglomerate of such a large number of Jesus' sayings at any other singular location.

European scholars were long aware that such logia of Jesus existed in Islamic traditions. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, such scholars set out to gather the sayings of Jesus from diverse Muslim sources. However, had they consulted *al-Durr*, they would have found therein not only a large stock of Jesus' sayings but also some unique ones. The academic interest in collecting Jesus' maxims from Muslim sources serves to highlight the insight of al-Suyūṭī and his accomplishment in procuring these sayings centuries earlier. In his *Christ in Islam*, James Robson recounts the early history of attempts by Western scholars to gather the sayings of Jesus from Muslim works.⁶⁸⁴ David Margoliouth collected and published seventy-one such sayings from al-Ghazālī's

⁶⁸³ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, p. 554. For variations of this tradition see pp. 555 and 558.

⁶⁸⁴ James Robson, *Christ in Islam* (London: John Murray, 1920).

Ihya' 'ulūm al-dīn and six sayings from other sources.⁶⁸⁵ Michael Asin y Palacios subsequently gathered two hundred and thirty-three sayings which he translated into Latin and published along with all but few of the original Arabic texts.⁶⁸⁶ Robson translated the traditions found in Asin's work, omitting those traditions for which Asin did not provide the Arabic text. Robson then combined these traditions with those of Margoliouth's collection and published the result.⁶⁸⁷

More recently, Tarif Khalidi published three hundred and three sayings and stories of Jesus in his *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature*.⁶⁸⁸ Khalidi observed that Asin had gathered his collection from as many as fifty-six classical Arabic sources.⁶⁸⁹ Khalidi made use of additional early but recently published works which were not available to Asin. These include works of piety from as early as the second/eighth century.⁶⁹⁰ Even though Khalidi listed Ibn 'Asākir's huge *History of the City of Damascus* in his bibliography, David Cook noticed that there are sayings of Jesus

⁶⁸⁵ Robson, p. 9. These sayings were published in the *Expository Times* (1893-4).

⁶⁸⁶ Robson, p. 9; Michael Asin y Palacios, *Logia et Agrapha Domini Jesu apud Moslemicos Scriptores, asceticos praesertim, usitata* in *Patrologia Orientalis* vols. xiii and xix.

⁶⁸⁷ Robson, *Christ in Islam*, op. cit. pp. 10 and 16. The total number of sayings in Robson's collection is not readily apparent. The largest number he has assigned to a saying reproduced from Asin's collection is 225 (see Robson, p. 61). It appears from a perusal of Robson's references to the two works that all the entries of Margoliouth's work were also found in Asin's. Moreover, Robson has noted that he omitted three sayings "owing to considerations of space" (Robson, p. 16). The work of al-Ghazālī referred to is *Ihya' 'ulūm al-dīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995).

⁶⁸⁸ Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

⁶⁸⁹ Khalidi, p. 4.

⁶⁹⁰ Khalidi, p. 5.

in that source which eluded Khalidi.⁶⁹¹ Cook decided to gather only those sayings of Jesus which appear to be reproductions of New Testament material. He published these in his “New Testament Citations in the *Ḥadīth* Literature and the Question of Early Gospel Translations into Arabic.”⁶⁹² That article contains fifty-nine short sayings and another passage exceeding three pages in length. This lengthy passage itself comprises a number of short sayings.⁶⁹³ Cook obtained that lengthy passage, and many of the other sayings, from Ibn ‘Asākir’s *History of the City of Damascus*.⁶⁹⁴

The thoroughness with which al-Suyūṭī approached his task is seen from the fact that he used not only Ibn ‘Asākir’s *History* but also the early sources mentioned by Khalidi. That al-Suyūṭī has compiled less than the number of sayings that Khalidi garnered is due not to al-Suyūṭī’s paucity of sources, but to three other factors. First, whereas Khalidi intended to arrive at a comprehensive collection, al-Suyūṭī obviously intended to collect only wisdom sayings—as his caption presages. Second, having compiled more than a hundred such sayings, this being an impressive compendium for a Qur’ān commentary, al-Suyūṭī decided to return to the business of exegesis of the Qur’ān’s remaining verses. Third, Khalidi included lengthy episodes some of which

⁶⁹¹ David Cook, “New Testament Citations in the *Ḥadīth* Literature and the Question of Early Gospel Translations into Arabic,” in *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, ed. Emmanouela Grypeou et al (Leiden, Brill, 2006) 185-223, pp. 191-92; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq* (Beirut: Mu’assisat al-Risālah, 1994). It is clear that Khalidi gathered many of his entries from another work of Ibn ‘Asākir, also listed in Khalidi’s bibliography: Ibn ‘Asākir, *Sīrat al-Sayyid al-Masīh li-bn ‘Asākir al-Dimashqī*, ed. Sulaymān ‘Alī Murād (Amman: Dār al-Shurūq, 1996). For the depiction of Jesus in this work, see the article by the author just named, Suleiman A. Mourad, “Jesus According to Ibn ‘Asākir,” in *Ibn ‘Asākir and Early Islamic History*, ed. James E. Lindsay (Princeton: Darwin Press, 2001) 24-43.

⁶⁹² See previous note.

⁶⁹³ Cook, pp. 206-23.

⁶⁹⁴ Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq* (Beirut: Mu’assisat al-Risālah, 1994).

contain extended descriptions of the acts of Jesus. On the other hand, al-Suyūṭī omitted those traditions which included extensive narrative content since he intended to describe the acts of Jesus in relation to other Qur’ānic verses. For example, Khalidi presented a narrative in which Mary mentions that, while she was pregnant, she used to converse with her unborn baby if no one else was present.⁶⁹⁵ Al-Suyūṭī did not present this story in his exegesis of Qur’ān 3:48, but he did so in his exegesis of Qur’ān 19:16. In that story, Mary declares:

When I was alone Jesus would address me and converse with me while he was in my womb. And when I was in the company of others I would hear him say in my womb, “Glory be to God,” and, “God is the greatest.”⁶⁹⁶

To be sure, some of al-Suyūṭī’s anecdotes at Qur’ān 3:48 involve some actions on the part of Jesus. But the acts of Jesus are kept to brief descriptions which often serve to situate Jesus vis-a-vis his listeners thus rendering his sayings comprehensible. In *al-Durr*, one of the longest descriptions of Jesus’ activity will be seen in the following narrative:

The disciples (*ḥawārīyūn*) had missed Jesus, so they went out looking for him, and found him walking on the water. One of them said, “Prophet of God, shall we walk towards you?” Jesus replied, “Yes!” So the disciple placed one leg on the water and proceeded to place the other, but he began to sink. “Give me your hand, O you of little faith,” said Jesus, “If the child of Ādam had conviction the weight of a grain or seed, she or he would have walked on water.”⁶⁹⁷

In that episode, Jesus’ speech is relatively minimal, whereas in most other episodes his speech is predominant.

⁶⁹⁵ Khalidi, episode 262, p. 195.

⁶⁹⁶ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 10, p. 45. Literally, *sabbaḥa . . . wa kabbara* (he declared God’s glory and greatness).

⁶⁹⁷ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, p. 556; Khalidi, episode 35, p. 72. Translation mine.

Al-Durr contains significant traditions, and variations of traditions, which Khalidi missed. This fact serves to heighten the value of al-Suyūṭī's singular achievement, since Khalidi's work represents the culmination of the research of a number of Western scholars. As for variations of traditions which Khalidi missed, we have seen al-Ḥasan's tradition above in which Jesus is given a specific title as Leader of the Ascetics. Khalidi did not reproduce that part of the statement which mentions the honorary title.⁶⁹⁸ Another important variation is found in the following tradition which, in al-Suyūṭī's version, reads:

A woman passed by Jesus and said, "Blessed be the breasts that nursed you and the womb that bore you." Jesus replied, "Blessed be those who read the Book of God and then act according to its contents."⁶⁹⁹

Khalidi was aware of this form of the saying even without consulting *al-Durr*. In the introduction to his work, he noted the location of the saying in Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal's *Kitāb al-Zuhd* (The book of renunciation).⁷⁰⁰ For the saying in his own work, however, Khalidi pointed to episode 59. But, in the comparable portion of Khalidi's episode 59, Jesus replies: "Blessed is he whom God has taught his Book and who dies without

⁶⁹⁸ Two of Khalidi's traditions combine to parallel the rest of al-Ḥasan's tradition. Khalidi's tradition 55 says that those who flee with their faith will be gathered with Jesus on the Day of Judgement, and his tradition 119 recounts the story of Jesus using a stone for a pillow (see Khalidi, pp. 83 and 119).

⁶⁹⁹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, p. 557. The saying is located in Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, ed. Muḥammad Jalāl Sharaf (Beirut: Dār al-Nahḍah al-ʿArabīyah, 1981) p. 164. For a variation in which Jesus mentions the *qur'ān* instead of *kitāb Allāh*, see also Cook, p. 199; for the discussion to which the said variation gives rise, see p. 199 nn. 34 and 35. Cook was aware of a version mentioning *kitāb Allāh*, but chose to keep the more difficult reading in his list of sayings (p. 216, episode 48) for he considered the term *qur'ān* to have initially meant simply Scripture before it came to refer specifically to the Muslim Scripture. On the meaning of the word Qur'ān see Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān* (Leiden: Brill, 2007) pp. 233-34.

⁷⁰⁰ See Khalidi, *Muslim Jesus*, p. 33, 230 n. 44.

becoming haughty.”⁷⁰¹ Khalidi’s version of Jesus’ reply is therefore very different from the canonical saying which, in its essence, al-Suyūṭī expressed.⁷⁰² As for traditions which al-Suyūṭī collected, yet Khalidi subsequently missed, the following example will suffice:

While Jesus was sitting with his *aṣḥāb* (companions) a woman passed by them. One of them looked at her. Another said to the one who looked at the woman, “You have fornicated.” But Jesus asked the accuser, “If you are fasting and you pass by a grill thus smelling the meat, do you suppose that you will have thereby broken your fast?” The man replied, “No.”⁷⁰³

The provenance of this material in Muslim literature remains an open question.

Robson suggests that many came by way of Nestorian monks who secluded themselves in Arabian deserts.⁷⁰⁴ Similarly, Khalidi has shown that some of the sayings came by way of the desert fathers.⁷⁰⁵ In his analysis of the New Testament traces found in such sayings, Cook observes that much of the material closely parallels Matthew’s Gospel, especially its account of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Cook writes that, although the entire Bible was not translated into Arabic until the ‘Abbāsīd period, there may have been translations of some portions of the Bible available to Muslims before that time.⁷⁰⁶

Moreover, seeing the length of the citation he has culled from Ibn ‘Asākir, and the

⁷⁰¹ Khalidi, *Muslim Jesus*, p. 85.

⁷⁰² Cf. Luke 11:27-28.

⁷⁰³ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, p. 568.

⁷⁰⁴ Robson, p. 13.

⁷⁰⁵ See, for example, Khalidi’s episode 80, p. 96. A comparable saying is in al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, p. 576. For the sayings of the desert fathers, see Benedicta Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection* (Oxford: Mowbray, 1981).

⁷⁰⁶ Cook, pp. 185-86, 204. On the dating of the Arabic translation of the Bible he cites Sidney Griffith, “The Gospel in Arabic: an Inquiry into its Appearance in the First ‘Abbasid Century,” in *Oriens Christianus* 69 (1985) 126-67. Similarly, S.M. Zwemer had reached the conclusion that many of these sayings are translations of some version of Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount. However, he argued for the availability of such translations only from the time of al-Ghazālī. See S.M. Zwemer, “Jesus Christ in the *Ihya* of al-Ghazali,” in *The Muslim World*, vol. 7, Issue 2 (April 1917) 144-158, p. 151.

proximity of its contents to New Testament passages, Cook concludes that the material did not depend entirely on an oral source.⁷⁰⁷ To aid further analysis of this question, Cook urges students to be alert to the presence of other New Testament citations in classical Muslim texts.⁷⁰⁸

Space allows here for only a brief look at some of the New Testament parallels in *al-Durr*. Jesus cautions his disciples against casting pearls to pigs.⁷⁰⁹ Jesus entreats his disciples, “You are the salt of the earth; but if salt becomes insipid, with what could it be salted?” He similarly warns them, “O salt of the earth! Do not become spoiled, for whatever is spoiled is to be treated with salt. But if salt is spoiled then there is nothing to cure it.”⁷¹⁰ Jesus issues a triple directive about charity, fasting, and prayer:

When you give charity with your right hand, hide it from your left. When you fast, oil your hair, and anoint your lips with oil so that an onlooker will not think that you are fasting. And when you pray, draw the blind over your door.⁷¹¹

Jesus cautions against trying to serve two masters, God and the world:

“A servant cannot manage to deal with two lords. If he pleases one he will displease the other, and vice-versa. Likewise one cannot manage to be a servant of the world while working for the hereafter”⁷¹²

Hence Jesus instructs, “Place your treasures in heaven; for the heart of a man is with his treasure.”⁷¹³ Moreover, “It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a

⁷⁰⁷ Cook, p. 201.

⁷⁰⁸ Cook, p. 206.

⁷⁰⁹ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, p. 577.

⁷¹⁰ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, p. 555.

⁷¹¹ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, p. 562.

⁷¹² Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, p. 575.

⁷¹³ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, p. 572.

needle than for a rich person to enter Paradise.”⁷¹⁴ Jesus said, “Goodness is not that you be good to those who are good to you. That is mere reciprocation. Real goodness is that which is done to those who are bad to you.”⁷¹⁵ Jesus practiced the same precept:

Jesus passed by some people who insulted him. But he spoke well to them. Then he passed by some people who insulted him even more. In turn, he increased the kindness of his response. One of the disciples remonstrated, “It is as if you are encouraging them to abuse you.” But Jesus replied, “Every man gives what he has.”⁷¹⁶

The following snippet demonstrates the practicality of the exhortation to turn the other cheek. While on a journey, Jesus and one of his disciples found their path blocked at the pass of Afīq when a man there laid the childish condition that he must first slap them before letting them pass.⁷¹⁷ Jesus accepted the terms, was slapped, and was given passage. But the disciple demurred. Jesus solved the stalemate by submitting his other cheek to be slapped in lieu of his disciples’ cheek.⁷¹⁸

Whatever the provenance of this material, it is evident that many of the sayings have been reshaped by Muslim considerations and sectarian polemics. For example, Jesus

⁷¹⁴ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, p. 558. Qur’ān 7:40 uses the same metaphor to emphasize a different teaching: that a proud rejecter of the signs of God cannot enter Paradise. That Muslims preserved that saying in its Gospel form reflects an impressive degree of care for the tradition. For a study of the classical exegeses on the meaning of the metaphor see Andrew Rippin, “Qur’ān 7.40: ‘Until the Camel Passes Through the Eye of the Needle,’” in Andrew Rippin, *The Qur’ān and its Interpretive Tradition* (Aldershot: Variorum, 2001) 108-113.

⁷¹⁵ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, p. 574.

⁷¹⁶ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, p. 574.

⁷¹⁷ Afīq is identified by al-Turkī as a village in Syria overlooking the Jordan. See al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, p. 568, n. 2.

⁷¹⁸ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, p. 568.

says, “Not as I intend, but as you intend, and not as I will, but as you will.”⁷¹⁹ Al-Suyūṭī obviously expects his readers to be familiar with the unstated context in which Jesus addresses God.⁷²⁰

What is most significant for the present study is the originality and enduring uniqueness of *al-Durr* due to its inclusion of these sayings attributed to Jesus. At Ibn Taymīyah’s urging in his *Muqaddimah*, it became easy to envision what a purely tradition-based *tafsīr* would look like: a mere collection of traditions.⁷²¹ What comes as a surprise in al-Suyūṭī’s rendition of such a *tafsīr* is not its radical adherence to that formal feature, but its contents. Here al-Suyūṭī has used the tradition-exclusive form to encompass traditions of a genre which had been previously absent from mainstream *tafsīrs*. As Khalidi explains, the rise of the *ḥadīth* collections meant a focus on Muḥammad as the sole prophetic authority for the elaboration of Islam’s religious teachings.⁷²² In those collections Jesus’ role was relegated to merely an eschatological one, “a somewhat distant figure of no immediate or pragmatic moral relevance to Muslim piety.”⁷²³ Tradition-based *tafsīrs* by definition rely on *ḥadīth*, and, especially by the time of Ibn Kathīr, on the major *ḥadīth* collections. Hence there was little chance that the maxims of Jesus would be collected in a *tafsīr* work. Khalidi mentions the genres of

⁷¹⁹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, p. 569. For the appeal of this saying to Muslims, see David Pinault, “Images of Christ in Arabic Literature” in *Die Welt des Islams*, New Series, Bd. 27. Nr. 1/3 (1987), 103-25, p. 104.

⁷²⁰ The utterance uses two words charged with Muslim theology regarding the problem of human will and divine predestination: *irādah* (intention) in the first formula; and *mashī’ah* (will) in the second.

⁷²¹ Ibn Taymīyah, *Muqaddimah fī uṣūl al-tafsīr* in Musā’id b. Sulaymān b. Nāṣir al-Ṭayyār, *Sharh Muqaddimah fī uṣūl al-tafsīr li-bn Taymīyah* (Damam: Dār Ibn al-Jawzī, 2007-8) pp. 251-54.

⁷²² Khalidi, *Muslim Jesus*, pp. 25-26.

⁷²³ Khalidi, *Muslim Jesus*, p. 26.

literature in which he found the sayings of Jesus scattered: “works of ethics and popular devotion, works of Adab (belles-lettres), works of Ṣūfism or Muslim mysticism, anthologies of wisdom, and histories of prophets and saints.”⁷²⁴ Exegesis is notably absent from that list of genres.

Even Ibn al-Mundhir, from whose work al-Suyūṭī obtained the first of his three traditions on Jesus’ school experience, was of little help to al-Suyūṭī as a source for Jesus’ wisdom sayings. Ibn al-Mundhir provided three traditions to explain the word ‘wisdom’ in his exegesis of Quran 3:48. The first tradition is ambivalent: wisdom is either “the *sunnah*” or what was expressed “by Jesus’ tongue.”⁷²⁵ Ibn al-Mundhir’s other two traditions are decisive. They assert that “*al-ḥikmah* is the *sunnah*.”⁷²⁶ It is thus to al-Suyūṭī’s exclusive credit that he has illustrated *al-ḥikmah* by incorporating the large stock of Jesus’ wisdom sayings into his exegesis. No exegete before or after him has done so. As E. Geoffroy writes in the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, the life mission which al-Suyūṭī adopted “consisted in transmitting to coming generations the Islamic cultural patrimony before it might disappear as a result of the carelessness of his contemporaries.”⁷²⁷

There is, however, another dimension to al-Suyūṭī’s innovation. Having in view al-Suyūṭī’s defense of Ibn al-Fāriḍ and Ibn al-‘Arabī, Geoffroy made the general observation that al-Suyūṭī spearheaded “a clear-sighted apology for Ṣūfism and its

⁷²⁴ Khalidi, *Muslim Jesus*, p. 3.

⁷²⁵ Ibn al-Mundhir, vol. 1, p. 206.

⁷²⁶ Ibn al-Mundhir, vol. 1, p. 206.

⁷²⁷ *EF*², vol. 9, p. 915.

masters.”⁷²⁸ It is now clear that, in presenting the sayings of Jesus, al-Suyūṭī was using the stock-in-trade of the traditionists to further his apology for Ṣūfīsm. Most of the sayings he has garnered are from the book on asceticism by Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal who was regarded in Baghdad as the leader of the traditionists.⁷²⁹

Al-Suyūṭī has thus used the work of the father of Sunnism to make the point, and *al-Durr* thus serves as a reminder of the ascetic feature of early traditionalism. Christopher Melchert has shown that, although Ibn Ḥanbal and early traditionists were distinguished from early Ṣūfīs, they nevertheless embraced certain aspects of asceticism.⁷³⁰ For example, they adopted a seriousness characterized by a refusal to laugh.⁷³¹ Yet the traditionists, especially Ibn Ḥanbal, were suspicious of Ṣūfīsm, and hostile to extreme forms of asceticism.⁷³² But the traditions to which al-Suyūṭī has drawn new attention show that Jesus embraced an extreme renunciation of the world and its comforts. What is even more remarkable is that, in this matter, al-Suyūṭī surpassed the Ṣūfī exegetes, since they failed to incorporate the traditions on the wisdom of the ascetic Jesus.

⁷²⁸ *EF*, vol. 9, p. 916.

⁷²⁹ Ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, op. cit. On the respect afforded Ibn Ḥanbal see Christopher Melchert, “The Piety of the *ḥadīth* Folk,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34 (2002), 425-39, p. 427.

⁷³⁰ Melchert, p. 427.

⁷³¹ Melchert, pp. 427-28.

⁷³² Melchert, p. 431.

5.4 Summary

In Quran 3:42-48 the angels announce to Mary that she will conceive, and that God will teach her son both scripture and wisdom. Most exegetes, including al-Suyūṭī, take the Arabic word for scripture here as a verbal noun indicating that God will teach Jesus the art of writing. However, al-Suyūṭī is unique in presenting the story of Jesus as a child at school dumbfounding his purported teacher with his superior knowledge. Surprisingly, the knowledge which Jesus demonstrates here is the knowledge of the allusive exegesis of the letters of the alphabet.

Esoteric exegesis has become commonplace in *Ṣūfī tafsīrs*. Yet the *Ṣūfī* exegetes do not present the story of Jesus in response to Quran 3:48. The few *Ṣūfī* exegetes who refer to Jesus' explication of the alphabet do so in response to Quran 1:1. Moreover, in their representation of Jesus in this regard, the *Ṣūfī* exegetes rely on traditions which the traditionists have deemed unreliable. Al-Suyūṭī, on the other hand, appealed to Jesus as an exponent of esoteric exegesis both at Quran 1:1 and Quran 3:48, and again at Quran 23:50. Al-Suyūṭī agreed with the traditionists' criticism of the popular tradition on which the *Ṣūfīs* have relied. But he sandwiched the impugned tradition between two others on which he based his tribute to Jesus. Al-Suyūṭī thus presented three traditions: he declared the first tradition authentic; and the second tradition false. He said nothing about the authenticity of his third tradition, but that of course is commensurate with his usual practice of presenting traditions without comment. The impression left with his readers, therefore, is that the third tradition is reliable, especially when seen in contrast with the impeached second tradition.

Al-Suyūṭī obtained the first tradition from the now mostly lost exegesis of Ibn al-Mundhir. This is the only tradition-based *tafsīr* prior to *al-Durr* which, in response to Quran 3:48, presents the story of Jesus at school. Other tradition-based exegetes rejected the story, but they justified their rejection on the basis of the tradition which, as al-Suyūṭī agrees, is fabricated. Thus al-Ṭabarī in his exegesis of Quran 1:1 criticized what would become al-Suyūṭī's second tradition at Quran 3:48. Ibn Kathīr added his voice to the chorus of deniers, but was silent about another *ḥadīth* only the narrative chain of which he offered in his *tafsīr* of Quran 1:1. It is this tradition, which Ibn Kathīr was unable to impugn, that al-Suyūṭī would include as his third tradition at Quran 3:48 and reintroduce at Quran 23:50. The fact that al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr have become the paradigmatic tradition-based *tafsīrs* meant that their joint denial of the story carried considerable weight. Al-Suyūṭī has thus boldly reclaimed the story that was lost to tradition-based *tafsīr* since the work of Ibn al-Mundhir fell into oblivion.

Al-Suyūṭī has had little success in influencing subsequent exegetes to include the story of Jesus as a schoolboy. Al-Shawkānī, who normally transcribes into his *tafsīr* the traditions of al-Suyūṭī, refused to reproduce the said reports about Jesus at Quran 3:48. In his exegesis of Quran 1:1 he reemphasized the traditional denunciation of the story. He too rejects the story by simply dismissing the tradition which al-Suyūṭī has already discredited. Al-Shawkānī was oblivious to al-Suyūṭī's other two traditions.

Al-Ālūsī, on the other hand, agreed that al-Suyūṭī's first and third traditions were sound. Yet he selected from those traditions only that part of the story, its mere preface, which was sufficient to establish that Jesus was taught by God rather than man. Al-Ālūsī has thus omitted the content of that teaching which the same traditions show to be

esoteric exegesis. Hence al-Suyūṭī has had limited success in influencing the subsequent *tafsīr* stream in this regard.

The reticence of the mainstream exegetes in following al-Suyūṭī’s lead, however, should not detract from our appreciation of the boldly unique commentary he has offered at Quran 3:48. Prior to al-Suyūṭī, those exegetes who affirmed the story of Jesus at school relied on a disputed tradition. And those who denied the story found sufficient justification in discrediting the same tradition. Al-Suyūṭī found a way out of this impasse. Based on traditions he tirelessly sourced, he presented Jesus as the pioneer of the allusive exegesis of the alphabet.

The story of Jesus at school was enough to mark al-Suyūṭī’s exegesis of Quran 3:48 as a unique moment in the history of *tafsīr*. But al-Suyūṭī did not stop there. He proceeded to illustrate the wisdom which God taught Jesus by providing one hundred and four wisdom sayings of Jesus. These sayings represent Jesus as a wandering ascetic sage—an image uniquely respected in Ṣūfī circles. Yet the Ṣūfī *tafsīrs* and the tradition-based *tafsīrs* alike have omitted the sayings of Jesus in the exegesis of Quran 3:48. Moreover, it is unlikely that any *tafsīr* before or after *al-Durr* contains such a long list of Jesus’ sayings anywhere. In this regard, al-Suyūṭī received no help even from Ibn al-Mundhir, for the latter explained “the wisdom” mentioned in Quran 3:48 as “the *sunnah*.”

Hence in his exegesis of Quran 3:48 al-Suyūṭī has combined his interest in stories with his interest in the wisdom sayings of Jesus as a Ṣūfī exegete and a wandering ascetic. With the presentation of all this material about Jesus in the commentary on that single verse, the presence of Jesus looms large in *al-Durr*. By way of contrast, references to Jesus in other *tafsīrs* are scattered and isolated. Since the nineteenth century, European

scholars have been combing Muslim traditional works for snippets of Jesus' wisdom. Had they turned to al-Suyūṭī's work as a source of Jesus' sayings they would have found therein a ready stock, for al-Suyūṭī's interest in collecting these sayings preceded theirs.

Al-Suyūṭī had restricted himself to saying in his *tafsīr* only what he could say by means of traditions. However, given his unparalleled mastery of the tradition, he was able to cite so many traditions and hence to say so much. Working within the limits of his self-imposed restriction, al-Suyūṭī used traditions to support esoteric exegesis after it was shunned by the mainstream exegetical tradition.

Chapter 6

Political and Sectarian Exegesis

6.1 Introduction

In the present chapter I show the remarkable degree to which al-Suyūṭī's exegesis supports tendentious Muslim views on the early caliphate and the ensuing sectarian disputes between Shī'īs and Sunnīs. In at least three ways, *al-Durr* stands in contrast with the *tafsīrs* of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr. First, al-Suyūṭī includes unique traditions in favour of 'Alī. Second, by means of traditions, as usual, al-Suyūṭī criticizes many of the early Muslim leaders who were embroiled in civil dissensions. Finally, al-Suyūṭī takes a particular interest in denigrating the Umayyad caliphate.

A brief historical reminder will be useful here. In the wake of Muḥammad's death, the early Muslims scrambled to appoint a successor.⁷³³ Sunnī sources generally express satisfaction with the course of early events.⁷³⁴ According to such sources, Abū Bakr, whose candidacy was soon promoted, eventually received enough pledges of fealty from those who mattered at the time; thus he became the first caliph.⁷³⁵ 'Alī, the cousin and son-in-law of Muḥammad, was the fourth caliph. Shī'ī sources insist that Abū Bakr

⁷³³ See Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muḥammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) p. 28.

⁷³⁴ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, trans. A. Guillaume, (UK: Oxford, 1955) p. 684.

⁷³⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī, vol. IX: The Last Years of the Prophet*, trans. Ismail K. Poonawala (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1990) p. 195.

and the next two caliphs usurped the right of ‘Alī who was not only to be the first caliph, but is also the first in a line of *imāms* all being from among his progeny.⁷³⁶

That controversy has had significant consequences for the formation and development of Qur’ānic commentaries. As Goldziher has demonstrated, both Sunnīs and Shī‘īs supported their views with partisan exegeses of selected Qur’ānic passages.⁷³⁷ Moreover, as John Burton has documented, such partisan politics provided fertile ground for the multiplication of *ḥadīths* credited to early authorities in defence of competing views.⁷³⁸ The most contentious of such *ḥadīths* would be immediately recognisable as belonging to a particular camp and hence readily dismissed by the other. But Brown has shown that Sunnīs tended to accept those Shī‘ī *ḥadīths* which they could interpret as falling within Sunnī parameters. Thus Sunnīs welcome, for example, *ḥadīths* promoting love for ‘Alī and his family and, more generally, the prophet’s family.⁷³⁹ Hence Shī‘ī *ḥadīths* found their way into Sunnī exegetical works, even those which staunchly maintain a Sunnī stance, as Saleh has shown in the case of al-Tha‘labī’s *tafsīr*.⁷⁴⁰

⁷³⁶ Zaydīs, in contradistinction to other Shī‘īs, merely believe that ‘Alī was most deserving of being the first caliph; they do not hold that Abū Bakr usurped ‘Alī’s right. Jārūdī Zaydīs, on the other hand, do assert ‘Alī’s right to be the first caliph. On the Zaydīs, and the Jārūdī branch of Zaydīs, see Heinz Halm, “The Zaydiyya,” in *Shi‘ism: Critical Concepts in Islamic Studies*, ed. Paul Luft and Colin Turner (London: Routledge, 2008) vol. 1, 106-110, p. 106; and Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi‘i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi‘ism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985) p. 49-51.

⁷³⁷ Ignaz Goldziher, *Schools of Koranic Commentators*, Trans. Wolfgang H. Behn (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006) p. 167-68.

⁷³⁸ John Burton, *An Introduction to the Ḥadīth* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994) p. 38.

⁷³⁹ Jonathan Brown, *Hadīth: Muḥammad’s Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (New York: Oneworld, 2009) pp. 137-39.

⁷⁴⁰ Saleh, *Formation*, p. 186.

There is an additional reason for al-Suyūṭī, being a Ṣūfī, to be interested in exegesis that favours ‘Alī. As Brown has indicated, Ṣūfīs think of ‘Alī as Muḥammad’s spiritual heir even if not his immediate temporal successor.⁷⁴¹ Moreover, the Ṣūfī practice of the investiture of the cloak (*khirqah*) is often defended on the assumption that ‘Alī had similarly bestowed his cloak on al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. When *ḥadīth* masters, including al-Suyūṭī’s contemporary al-Sakhāwī, denied the immediate link between ‘Alī and al-Ḥasan, however, it was al-Suyūṭī who again proved that connection.⁷⁴²

6.2 ‘Alī as the Patron of Muslims

Al-Suyūṭī’s proclivity for Shī‘ī exegesis will be seen in his approach to Qur’ān 5:67, which reads as follows:

Messenger, proclaim everything that has been sent down to you from your Lord—if you do not, then you will not have communicated His message—and God will protect you from people.⁷⁴³

In his exegesis of that verse, al-Suyūṭī’s first concern is to establish the cause of Muḥammad’s anxiety. Addressing that concern, al-Suyūṭī presents six traditions. The first two traditions indicate that when Muḥammad was anxious about delivering his message, fearful of the response of his people, God assured him of divine protection. Al-Suyūṭī’s third *ḥadīth* shows that Muḥammad is being warned lest he conceals even a single verse that is revealed to him.

The fourth *ḥadīth* gets to the heart of the Sunnī-Shī‘ī dispute: the incident at the Ghadīr (a pool or marsh) of Khumm which is situated en route from Mecca to Medina.

⁷⁴¹ Brown, p. 189.

⁷⁴² Brown, pp. 190-91; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥāwī li-l-fatāwī*, vol. 2, pp 122-23.

⁷⁴³ Qur’ān 5:67, trans. Abdel Haleem, p. 74.

Shīʿīs and Sunnīs agree that, on his return from the pilgrimage in the year 10/623, Muḥammad stopped at Ghadīr Khumm where he declared ʿAlī the *walī* (patron) of Muslims.⁷⁴⁴ But Shīʿīs and Sunnīs disagree on how to interpret the incident. Shīʿīs say that the incident indicates ʿAlī’s right to succeed the prophet; Sunnīs say that the incident merely proves that Muslims should love and respect ʿAlī. As Vaglieri observed, many Sunnī sources “pass in silence over Muḥammad’s stop at Ghadīr Khumm, or, if they mention it, say nothing of his discourse.” According to Vaglieri, the reason for this silence is that Sunnī sources hesitate to provide “material for the polemic of the Shīʿīs who used these words to support their thesis of ʿAlī’s right to the caliphate.”⁷⁴⁵

We will presently see that, in their exegesis of Qurʾān 5:67, the tradition-based exegetes al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr have each failed to mention the story of Ghadīr Khumm. Al-Suyūfī breaks that Sunnī silence with his fourth *ḥadīth* asserting that Qurʾān 5:67 was revealed concerning ʿAlī b. Abū Tālib on the day of Ghadīr Khumm.⁷⁴⁶ Al-Suyūfī’s fifth tradition is more astonishing. That tradition is gleaned from Ibn Mardawayh, and rests on the authority of Ibn Masʿūd who asserts:

During Muḥammad’s lifetime we used to read, “Messenger, proclaim everything that has been sent down to you from your Lord—that ʿAlī is the patron (*mawlā*) of the believers—if you do not, then you will not have communicated His message—and God will protect you from people.”⁷⁴⁷

⁷⁴⁴ L. Veccia Vaglieri, “Ghadīr Khumm,” in *EF*², vol. 2, p. 993.

⁷⁴⁵ *EF*², vol. 2, p. 993.

⁷⁴⁶ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 5, p. 383.

⁷⁴⁷ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 5, p. 383. On the attribution of this reading to Ibn Masʿūd see Arthur Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qurʾān: The Old Codices* (Leiden: Brill, 1937) p. 40. My translation reflects the vocalization in *al-Durr*; hence ‘that’ translates from *anna*. Jeffery’s text presents the variant reading as beginning with *inna*, a particle which merely introduces a nominal sentence. That particle usually has no effect on the English translation.

In that reported reading the words, “that ‘Alī is the patron of the believers,” is boldly inserted in the verse thus specifying what precisely Muḥammad was being inspired to proclaim.⁷⁴⁸ Al-Suyūṭī’s sixth tradition shows that after the death of Muḥammad, Ibn ‘Abbās affirmed that the prophet publicized what he was commissioned to preach; and Ibn ‘Abbās denied that the prophet left his family any secret document.⁷⁴⁹ The sixth tradition was obviously circulated as a rejoinder to a Shī‘ī belief that Muḥammad’s family possessed a secret testament in ‘Alī’s favour. But that sixth tradition is shown to be futile when placed in juxtaposition with the two traditions which al-Suyūṭī presented just before it. According to al-Suyūṭī’s fourth and fifth traditions, Muḥammad made a public declaration in favour of ‘Alī; and Muslims were reciting the equivalent of that declaration as a part of the Qur’ān. Nothing could be more publicized. Hence there remained no need for a secret document attesting to ‘Alī’s position; and no need to deny the existence of such a document. Al-Suyūṭī has thus simultaneously buttressed the Shī‘ī position and declawed a counter-Shī‘ī tradition.

Turning now to al-Ṭabarī’s *tafsīr* of Qur’ān 5:67, we find no mention therein of the incident at Ghadīr Khumm.⁷⁵⁰ Nothing in al-Ṭabarī’s exegesis here draws explicit attention to the Shī‘ī-Sunnī controversy. Right from the start, al-Ṭabarī has identified the

⁷⁴⁸ This characteristically Shī‘ī reading has been catalogued in Meir M. Bar-Asher, “Variant Readings and Additions of the Imāmī-Shī‘ah to the Qur’ān,” in *Shi’ism*, ed. Paul Luft et al, vol. 2, 86-113, p. 98.

⁷⁴⁹ On the Shī‘ī belief that Muḥammad left ‘Alī some undeclared oral or written testament see Etan Kohlberg, “*Taqiyya* in Shī‘ī Theology and Religion,” in *Shi’ism*, ed. Paul Luft et al, vol. 2, 235-266, pp. 243-44. Below we will encounter a tradition according to which ‘Alī keeps in the hilt of his sword a piece of writing which he received from the prophet. However, that tradition says nothing about the caliphate and nothing about ‘Alī.

⁷⁵⁰ See al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 6, pp. 364-67.

problem which Muḥammad faced. Muḥammad was afraid of the reaction of the Jews and Christians “and all other polytheists.”⁷⁵¹ Hence God instructs Muḥammad to declare the revelation even though in so doing he risks provoking his opponents. Al-Ṭabarī points out that the verses before and after Qur’ān 5:67 do in fact lambaste the People of the Book.⁷⁵² According to al-Ṭabarī, then, Qur’ān 5:67 assures Muḥammad that God will protect him against his enemies while he broadcasts the unwelcome revelation.⁷⁵³ By introducing his exegesis of the verse with such a summation of the verse’s meaning, al-Ṭabarī has set the tone for an understanding of the traditions which he is about to present.

Al-Ṭabarī does not indicate that Qur’ān 5:67 was revealed concerning ‘Alī, but gives two alternative reasons for the revelation of the verse. First, it was revealed because a Bedouin attempted to kill Muḥammad.⁷⁵⁴ The verse thus gives the reason for the failure of that assassination attempt: God is protecting Muḥammad. Second, the verse was revealed because Muḥammad was afraid of the Quraysh; hence the verse assures him that he is secure against them.⁷⁵⁵ Al-Ṭabarī supplies a tradition each in favour of the two views. Al-Ṭabarī then presents four traditions related on the authority of ‘Ā’ishah. She attests, based on her inference from Qur’ān 5:67, that anyone who accuses Muḥammad of concealing any part of the revelation has uttered an enormous lie.⁷⁵⁶ It is contrary to al-

⁷⁵¹ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 6, p. 364.

⁷⁵² See Qur’ān 5:59-68.

⁷⁵³ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 6, p. 365.

⁷⁵⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 6, p. 366.

⁷⁵⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 6, p. 366.

⁷⁵⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 6, pp. 366-67.

Ṭabarī's usual procedure that he has offered no analysis of 'Ā'ishah's traditions. Those traditions are nonetheless clearly directed against the Shī'ī claim to covert teachings. In sum, al-Ṭabarī's treatment of Qur'ān 5:67 is completely devoid of any mention of 'Alī, and leaves no room for the verse to be interpreted in his favour.

Ibn Kathīr expands on al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr* by providing additional supporting narratives. 'Ā'ishah's *ḥadīth* which says that the prophet did not fail to publicise every verse of the Qur'ān now receives support from a similar tradition attributed to 'Alī himself, and yet another attributed to Ibn 'Abbās. Ibn 'Abbās' *ḥadīth* is the same as al-Suyūfī's sixth tradition seen above. According to 'Alī's *ḥadīth*, 'Alī swears by God that he possesses no revealed material other than the Qur'ān except for that degree of comprehension of the Qur'ān which God bestows on a man, and what is contained *fī ḥādhihī al-ṣaḥīfah* (in this scroll).⁷⁵⁷ Asked what is in the scroll, 'Alī responds, "The intellect (*al-'aql*), freeing the captives, and that a Muslim is not to be killed in retaliation for a non-Muslim."⁷⁵⁸ That scroll says nothing about the caliphate, and nothing specifically in favour of 'Alī. Moreover, Ibn Kathīr furnishes two traditions which show that during the *ḥajj* Muḥammad prompted his followers to bear witness that he did proclaim the complete message. The multitudes of Muslims present thus publically bore witness to Muḥammad's faithfulness in conveying the message. In this way, Ibn Kathīr has expended his most determined efforts to underpin the Sunnī position.

⁷⁵⁷ On the claim made in the pre-Buwayhid period that the canonical Qur'ān is incomplete while other Qur'ānic material remain in the possession of the Shī'ī *imāms*, see the introduction in Etan Kohlberg and Mohammad 'Alī Amir-Moezzi, *Revelation and Falsification: Kitāb al-qirā'āt of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Sayyārī* (Leiden: Brill, 2009) p. 24.

⁷⁵⁸ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 3, p. 1204.

Like al-Ṭabarī before him, Ibn Kathīr in his exegesis of Qur’ān 5:67 fails to mention that the verse was revealed at Ghadīr Khumm regarding ‘Alī. Similarly, Ibn Kathīr fails to mention the variant Qur’ān reading proclaiming ‘Alī’s status as patron of the Muslims. Hence, by granting ‘Alī such a favourable showing in the *tafsīr* of Qur’ān 5:67, al-Suyūṭī stands in sharp contrast with the tradition-based exegetes al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr.

We shall presently see how the exegetes who normally use *al-Durr* as a basis for their own works respond to al-Suyūṭī’s exegesis of Qur’ān 5:67. Al-Shawkānī began his exegesis of the verse by absorbing traditions from Ibn Kathīr.⁷⁵⁹ He continues in this way elucidating the verse one segment after another until he gets to the last segment. But, given his Zaydī background, it should not come as a surprise if he welcomes the traditions which we have seen in *al-Durr*.⁷⁶⁰ Sure enough, after al-Shawkānī had once concluded his commentary on Qur’ān 5:67, he began to copy the traditions of al-Suyūṭī. Thus in effect he began his commentary on the verse all over again. It is obvious that after al-Shawkānī had reproduced Ibn Kathīr’s commentary on the verse he remained dissatisfied with the outcome. Al-Suyūṭī’s traditions provided the remedy for al-Shawkānī’s dissatisfaction. Al-Shawkānī’s shift towards Sunnī traditionalism would not

⁷⁵⁹ Al-Shawkānī, p. 479.

⁷⁶⁰ Al-Shawkānī’s exegesis is often characterized as that of a Zaydī. See Muḥammad Husayn al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa-l-mufasssīrūn* (Cairo: Matabi Dar al-Kutub al-Arabi, 1962) vol. 2, p. 285; Claude Gilliot, “Exegesis of the Qur’ān: Classical and Medieval,” in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, ed. Jane McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2002) vol. 2, 99-124. Al-Shawkānī was born to Zaydī-Hādawī parents. He was raised and educated in the Zaydī village Hijrat Shawkān located south-east of Sanaa. He lived and died in the same environment, not venturing out of Yemen, oddly not even for the pilgrimage, since, as he explains, he lacked parental permission. See his autobiography in al-Shawkānī, *al-Badr al-ṭāli’ bi-maḥāsīn man ba’d al-qarn al-sābi’* (Damascus: Dār ibn Kathīr, 2006) pp. 768-78.

be compromised by the adoption of the said traditions, especially after they were already adopted by al-Suyūṭī whose Sunnī status is indubitable.⁷⁶¹

Al-Shawkānī copied from *al-Durr* all of the six traditions we have seen above. He began with al-Suyūṭī's second tradition then returned to the first; then he copied the rest in the same sequence as found in *al-Durr*. Hence al-Shawkānī has given an airing to al-Suyūṭī's two pro-ʿAlī traditions: one on the occasion of revelation at Ghadīr Khumm; and another on the variant Qurʾān reading mentioning ʿAlī. Al-Ālūsī also included the two pro-ʿAlī traditions while explicitly attributing them to al-Suyūṭī.⁷⁶² Al-Ālūsī added that the Shīʿīs have turned the Ghadīr Khumm incident into their central argument which is based not only on the *ḥadīth* in question but especially on their objectionable additions to that *ḥadīth*. He then sets out to refute the Shīʿī claim that Muḥammad designated ʿAlī as his *khalīfah* at Ghadīr Khumm. Hence whereas both al-Suyūṭī and al-Shawkānī presented the controversial traditions without adding any negative comments, al-Ālūsī absorbed the traditions into a lengthy anti-Shīʿī polemical discourse. While I remain disinterested in al-Ālūsī's polemics, I will focus on the contrast between his *tafsīr* and that of al-Suyūṭī.

After presenting al-Suyūṭī's two traditions in question, al-Ālūsī presented some additional traditions from other sources, refuting those which he can refute. For example,

⁷⁶¹ In his writings al-Shawkānī declared himself an absolute *mujtahid*. There was already a line of Zaydīs who had become more and more trusting of, and reliant on, the Sunnī *ḥadīth* sources. Following this line of traditionists, al-Shawkānī thus freed himself of *taqlīd* (imitation). In the view of moderate Zaydīs, it is acceptable, even in the presence of the ideal candidate, for a less than ideal candidate to hold the caliphate. On that basis, they accept the legitimacy of the first three caliphs. Al-Shawkānī adopted such a moderate view, but had to express it with caution. For, there were Hādawīs, intolerant of the first three caliphs, ever ready to criticize al-Shawkānī on this account. His *tafsīr* was completed in 1229/1814. By this time, there was already a history of Hādawī responses to al-Shawkānī's Sunnī leanings. See Bernard Haykel, *Revival and Reform in Islam: The Legacy of Muḥammad al-Shawkānī* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) pp. 18-19, 143, 165.

⁷⁶² Al-Ālūsī, *Rūh al-maʿānī: tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm wa-l-sabʿ al-mathānī* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.) vol. 4, p. 282.

al-Ālūsī writes of one of these additional traditions that it is quite objectionable (*munkar jiddan*).⁷⁶³ Another he castigates as being weak, and adds that one of its narrators is a Shī'ī who is to be rejected.⁷⁶⁴

Yet al-Ālūsī has not been able to reject al-Suyūṭī's two traditions in question: the one about Ghadīr Khumm and the other on the variant reading. Hence he resorts to interpreting these traditions with an aim to counter Shī'ī interpretations of the same. Al-Ālūsī maintains that the believers are *awliyā'* (friends and supporters) of each other, as indicated by Qur'ān 9:71.⁷⁶⁵ Of the Ghadīr Khumm *ḥadīth* he writes that it indicates nothing more than the virtue of 'Alī, and that he is the *walī* (friend) of the believers in the sense in which believers are *awliyā'* of each other.⁷⁶⁶ He adds that Sunnīs do not reject that appraisal of 'Alī and, indeed, rejecting it is anathema. According to al-Ālūsī, Ibn Mas'ūd's reading of Qur'ān 5:67 likewise implies only that 'Alī is a friend of the believers.⁷⁶⁷

To conclude, we have seen a variety of approaches to the exegesis of Qur'ān 5:67. Al-Suyūṭī has given an exegesis in favour of 'Alī as the *walī* or *mawlā* of Muslims. Al-Suyūṭī's fourth tradition regarding Ghadīr Khumm, and his fifth regarding Ibn Mas'ūd's variant reading found no mention either in al-Ṭabarī or Ibn Kathīr. Moreover, Ibn Kathīr made special efforts to gather traditions that serve to deny that 'Alī and the rest of the

⁷⁶³ Al-Ālūsī, vol. 4, p. 284.

⁷⁶⁴ Al-Ālūsī, vol. 4, p. 284.

⁷⁶⁵ Al-Ālūsī, vol. 4, p. 287.

⁷⁶⁶ Al-Ālūsī, vol. 4, p. 287.

⁷⁶⁷ Al-Ālūsī, vol. 4, p. 287. In his copy of the variant reading, al-Ālūsī substitutes *walī* for al-Suyūṭī's *mawlā*.

prophet's family received esoteric knowledge from Muḥammad. In this way, Ibn Kathīr kept the exegesis of the verse decidedly Sunnī. Al-Suyūṭī, on the other hand, made a bold attempt to bring his fourth and fifth traditions to the foreground of Sunnī exegesis.

Al-Suyūṭī's efforts were not in vain, for al-Shawkānī, having already finished his sequential commentary on the various parts of the verse found it necessary to finally add the traditions from al-Suyūṭī thus further publicising the traditions in question. Yet, by combining the approaches of both Ibn Kathīr and al-Suyūṭī, al-Shawkānī failed to give al-Suyūṭī's traditions the undivided attention they command in *al-Durr*. Al-Ālūsī, for his part, has evident respect for 'Alī, for he never refers to 'Alī without adding the benediction, "May God maintain the nobility of his face."⁷⁶⁸ Yet al-Ālūsī has made every effort to impugn the *ḥadīths* which speak of the incident at Ghadīr Khumm. Unable to impeach al-Suyūṭī's fourth *ḥadīth*, al-Ālūsī resorted to interpreting it in an effort to harness the *ḥadīth* and keep it within Sunnīs constraints. Al-Ālūsī used the same strategy in dealing with the variant reading attributed to Ibn Mas'ūd.⁷⁶⁹ Our purpose here is not to assess the merits of al-Ālūsī's arguments, but merely to appreciate al-Suyūṭī's unique achievement in bringing these traditions to the foreground of Sunnī exegesis.⁷⁷⁰

⁷⁶⁸ The benediction is so specific to 'Alī in al-Ālūsī's *tafsīr* that often al-Ālūsī feels no need to mention him by name. Al-Ālūsī often refers to 'Alī as "the *imām*" followed by *karram Allāh wajhahū*. See, for example, al-Ālūsī, vol. 4, p. 285.

⁷⁶⁹ Lest it appears that al-Ālūsī unduly disfavours 'Alī, however, it is necessary to add that he approves of the Ṣūfī interpretation of 'Alī as the first spiritual caliph (see al-Ālūsī, vol. 4, p. 273).

⁷⁷⁰ Space does not permit here a similar comparison of the above *tafsīrs* with respect to the exegesis of Qur'ān 5:55; otherwise, it would be demonstrated that there too al-Suyūṭī has shown an extraordinary interest, vis-a-vis the other exegetes, in presenting traditions in favour of 'Alī as *al-walī*.

6.3 'Alī as the Guide of Muslims

When Moojan Momen in his *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam* wanted to point to an example of a Sunnī scholar supporting a Shī'ī interpretation of Qur'ān 13:7, he picked on al-Suyūfī.⁷⁷¹ It remains for us to see here how al-Suyūfī's commentary on the verse compares with that of other Sunnī exegetes, especially al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr. Qur'ān 13:7 reads: The deniers say, 'If only a sign will be caused to descend upon him from his Lord.' You are only a warner; and [there is] for every people a guide.⁷⁷²

I have bracketed the words 'there is' in the last clause of that translation since, literally, the verse could be understood in two ways: first, that the warner is also a guide for every people; and, second, that the warner and the guide are two distinct entities. We will presently see that each of these two meanings of the verse becomes the basis of exegesis in the major *tafsīrs*. The heart of the controversy in relation to this verse is that whereas some Sunnīs are willing to identify 'Alī as the guide mentioned in the verse, Shī'īs use that identification as evidence for 'Alī's claim to the caliphate.

There is no dispute among the exegetes that the warner (*al-nadhīr*) addressed in the verse is Muḥammad. However, the exegetes expend their energies in attempting to identify a guide (*hād*) for every people, or the guide (*al-hādī*) for all peoples.⁷⁷³ Al-Ṭabarī lists six views.⁷⁷⁴ First, the guide is the Messenger of God. Second, the guide is God himself who guides every people. Third, the guide is a prophet (*nabī*). Fourth, the guide

⁷⁷¹ Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985) p. 17.

⁷⁷² Translation mine.

⁷⁷³ The verse literally says that for every people there will be *a* guide (*hād*). The noun is indefinite.

⁷⁷⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 13, pp. 128-31.

is a leader (*qā'id* or *imām*). Fifth, the guide is 'Alī b. Abū Ṭālib. Sixth, the guide is a caller (*dā'*). In support of these six opinions, al-Ṭabarī has presented a total of twenty-five traditions. The third opinion, that the guide is a prophet, is supported by the largest number of traditions: nine. On the other hand, al-Ṭabarī advances only one tradition in support of the view that 'Alī is the guide:

Ibn 'Abbās relates that when [Qur'ān 13:7] was revealed the prophet placed his hand on his own chest and said, "I am the warner, and there is a guide for every people." He pointed with his hand towards 'Alī's shoulder and said, "You are the guide, 'Alī. Through you the guided ones will be guided after me."⁷⁷⁵

This is an intriguing tradition. Though it stops short of affording 'Alī the title 'caliph,' it indicates that Muslims will be guided by 'Alī after Muḥammad's demise. In his summary, however, al-Ṭabarī completely ignores that *ḥadīth* and the view it implies: that 'Alī is the guide of every people. Al-Ṭabarī now reduces his list of possible guides to four. At first glance, he thus appears to have also discarded here the view that the guide is the Messenger of God, and therefore Muḥammad. However, al-Ṭabarī retains the view that the guide is one of God's prophets.⁷⁷⁶ Since Muḥammad is a prophet, al-Ṭabarī implies that Muḥammad is also a guide, at least for his *ummah*. Al-Ṭabarī reminds his readers that he had already explained the meaning of 'the guidance' (*al-hidāya*). The guide (*al-hādī*), he now adds, is the *imām* who leads the people and who is to be followed. Since this is the meaning of guidance, al-Ṭabarī argues, the guide could be any or all of the following. First, God is the guide who guides his creation; his creation

⁷⁷⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 13, pp. 130.

⁷⁷⁶ In the traditional Muslim view, every messenger of God is necessarily also a prophet of God, but not vice-versa. See Uri Rubin, "The Qur'ānic Idea of Prophets and Prophethood," in Uri Rubin, *Muḥammad: the Prophet and Arabia* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2001) II, pp. 1-2.

follows his guidance and likewise follows his commands and his prohibitions. Second, the prophet of God is a guide; the prophet's community follows his example. Third, the guide could be one of the *imāms* (*imām min al-a'immaḥ*) whose example is followed and whose companions follow his method and his path. Fourth, the guide could be one of the callers (*dā' min al-du'āt*) towards either good or evil.

Since the caller is in the same list with God himself and God's prophet, we might expect al-Ṭabarī to mean that the caller in question calls towards good and away from evil. But in his systematic manner he wants to first outline the linguistic implications of the text. Having laid out his premise, he continues to reach for a logical conclusion. Since the guide could be all of the above, al-Ṭabarī argues, there is no better way to speak of the guide than in the general manner in which God himself said it. Muḥammad is the warner to whom the warning was sent, and every people has a guide who guides them; they follow him and imitate his example. For al-Ṭabarī, then, the guide does not have to have a specific identity. In fact, given the literal meaning of the verse, the guide could even be one who guides towards evil. Al-Ṭabarī concludes by saying that the guide could be any or all of these: God, a prophet of God, an *imām*; or a caller either to good or evil.

Nowhere does 'Alī appear by name in the summary list of possible guides. By the same token, al-Ṭabarī did not mention Muḥammad specifically as a candidate for the post of guide in the final analysis. Nor did al-Ṭabarī exclude Muḥammad. Muḥammad's inclusion is implicit, under the category of prophets, in al-Ṭabarī's conclusion. Therefore al-Ṭabarī loses nothing by not mentioning Muḥammad in the conclusion, especially since there is no dispute among Muslims that Muḥammad is a guide for his *ummaḥ*. Similarly, there is nothing in al-Ṭabarī's summary to deny that 'Alī is an *imām* or, at least, a caller

towards good and hence also a guide for Muslims. Yet the stark reality is that after he had introduced ‘Alī in the body of his discussion, al-Ṭabarī dropped him in the final analysis. Now al-Ṭabarī says nothing specifically about whether or not ‘Alī is a guide for Muslims after Muḥammad’s demise. In sum, al-Ṭabarī has not indicated what is to be done with the tradition he mentioned. Something is lost by the non-mention of ‘Alī in al-Ṭabarī’s final analysis. For, if ‘Alī was singled out as the guide for Muḥammad’s *ummah* then Shī‘īs could use that fact as evidence in their argument for ‘Alī’s caliphate.

Ibn Kathīr presents the complete range of opinions which we have encountered in al-Ṭabarī’s *tafsīr*. Hence Ibn Kathīr knows of the *ḥadīth* about ‘Alī; but after citing it he remarks that the *ḥadīth* is extremely objectionable.⁷⁷⁷ Even so, he adds another report on the authority of ‘Alī himself who said that the guide is a man of Banū Hāshim. Since both ‘Alī and Muḥammad are among the Banū Hāshim ‘Alī’s saying is ambivalent. Moreover, given ‘Alī’s saying, the guide could be any man of an entire clan. But that *ḥadīth* also contains the appended comment from a certain Junayd: “He is ‘Alī b. Abū Ṭālib.”⁷⁷⁸ Ibn Kathīr cites that tradition from Ibn Abī Ḥātim. Meanwhile, Ibn Abī Ḥātim had added to that *ḥadīth* a note saying that “something similar (*naḥwa dhālik*)” was reported through one line of transmission from Ibn ‘Abbās and another lesser authority.⁷⁷⁹ It is not clear what ‘something similar’ refers to, whether to the statement of ‘Alī or Junayd or both. Ibn Kathīr copies the note from Ibn Abī Ḥātim as it is, thus maintaining the ambiguity. In sum, Ibn Kathīr has rejected the *ḥadīth* in which the prophet singled out ‘Alī as the guide,

⁷⁷⁷ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 4, p. 1878.

⁷⁷⁸ Ibn Kathīr’s source, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, names the said person as Ibn al-Junayd. See Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr Ibn Abī Ḥātim* (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob Al-Ilmiya, 2006) vol. 6, p. 13.

⁷⁷⁹ Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr*, vol. 6, p. 13; Ibn Kathīr, vol. 4, p. 1878.

and has replaced it with a saying of ‘Alī that the guide is Hāshimī. In Ibn Kathīr’s exegesis it was the unidentifiable Junayd who singled out ‘Alī as *the* man of all the men of the prophet’s clan. The overall effect is that Ibn Kathīr made the claim of ‘Alī appear weaker than it did in al-Ṭabarī’s *tafsīr*.

Al-Suyūṭī in *al-Durr* does not shy away from the Shī‘ī claim. *Al-Durr* contains traditions supporting five of the six opinions we had learnt from al-Ṭabarī. As usual, *al-Durr* lacks al-Ṭabarī’s analysis, or any analysis.⁷⁸⁰ Absent here is the view that the guide is a leader. What is noteworthy is that al-Suyūṭī neither circumvents the *ḥadīth* about ‘Alī in the manner of al-Ṭabarī nor casts doubt upon it in the manner of Ibn Kathīr. We have seen that out of the twenty-five traditions which al-Ṭabarī presented he afforded only one in favour of ‘Alī as guide. In sharp contrast, five of al-Suyūṭī’s fourteen traditions here support the said view. Thus it turns out that, whereas al-Suyūṭī allowed for five views, the one he supported with the largest number of traditions is the view that ‘Alī is the guide.

Al-Suyūṭī has not only increased the number of traditions. He has also increased the number of authorities behind two of the traditions he mentions. The first of al-Suyūṭī’s five traditions is the same tradition I have cited above from al-Ṭabarī wherein Muḥammad points to ‘Alī’s shoulder. As an obvious rejoinder to Ibn Kathīr’s denial of the authenticity of that tradition, al-Suyūṭī now names five additional sources for it. In al-Suyūṭī’s second tradition Muḥammad simply says, “I am the warner and ‘Alī is the guide.” In al-Suyūṭī’s third tradition, a Companion reports that he heard the prophet identifying himself as the warner in the manner already seen in the first tradition. But now, instead of pointing towards ‘Alī’s shoulder, the prophet placed his hand on the chest

⁷⁸⁰ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 8, pp. 373-76.

of ‘Alī, saying, “There is a guide for every people.” Al-Suyūṭī’s fourth tradition is reported from Ibn ‘Abbās who relates that the prophet said, “I am the warner; and the guide is ‘Alī b. Abū Ṭālib.” This is essentially the same statement Muḥammad made in al-Suyūṭī’s second tradition above.

Al-Suyūṭī lists several known traditionists as sources for his fifth tradition: Ibn Abī Ḥātim; al-Ṭabarānī; Ibn Mardawayh; Ibn ‘Asākir; ‘Abdullāh b. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal; and al-Ḥākim. Al-Suyūṭī notes that al-Ḥākim considered the tradition *ṣahīḥ* (authentic). In this tradition, ‘Alī b. Abū Ṭālib says, “The Messenger of God is the warner; and I am the guide.” But, according to another wording of that statement, as reported in the same tradition, ‘Alī said: “The guide is a man from Banū Hāshim,” meaning ‘Alī himself.⁷⁸¹ The last part of that tradition is the one favourably presented by Ibn Kathīr. But it is interesting to observe what al-Suyūṭī has done with it. Al-Suyūṭī did not leave the matter to rest with ‘Alī’s vague reference to a Hāshimī which someone else has to specify as ‘Alī himself. Rather, he has combed additional sources to find and present a variation of the tradition in which ‘Alī himself made the positive identification.

In short, al-Suyūṭī has outstripped al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr in emphasising the view that ‘Alī is the guide of Muslims. Al-Ṭabarī mentioned one *ḥadīth* in favour of that view but subsequently ignored the view and its supporting *ḥadīth*. Ibn Kathīr disparaged that *ḥadīth*, but added another which speaks of the guide being, ambiguously, a Hāshimī. Al-Suyūṭī, on the other hand, took the trouble to shore up the tradition which al-Ṭabarī disregarded and Ibn Kathīr discounted. As for the vague tradition, al-Suyūṭī found a variation of it that makes the identification of ‘Alī specific. Finally, al-Suyūṭī

⁷⁸¹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 8, p. 376.

supplemented these two traditions with three others resulting in a total of five traditions in support of ‘Alī as the guide. Thus al-Suyūṭī, a Sunnī exegete, exhibits a remarkable level of interest in ‘Alī. It is now clear why Momen pointed to al-Suyūṭī as an example of a Sunnī exegete who supports a Shī‘ī interpretation of Qur’ān 13:7.

Despite his Zaydī background, al-Shawkānī did not present a single tradition identifying ‘Alī as the guide mentioned in Qur’ān 13:7. Al-Shawkānī writes that the guide is a caller and, more specifically, a prophet. To al-Shawkānī, the last part of that verse means that every people had a prophet. The only tradition al-Shawkānī presents here is one that identifies Muḥammad as the guide. Then he adds a possible alternative view that God himself is the guide, since the prophets can only warn people but cannot ultimately cause them to be guided.⁷⁸² In short, al-Shawkānī says nothing here in favour of ‘Alī.

As for al-Ālūsī, in his exegesis of Qur’ān 13:7, he allows for the full range of Sunnī exegetical opinions we have encountered above—except for the opinion that ‘Alī is the guide. He writes that the Shī‘īs say that ‘Alī is the guide on the basis of certain traditions. Al-Ālūsī now presents two such traditions. It turns out that these are al-Suyūṭī’s first and last *ḥadīths*, the ones for which al-Suyūṭī had pointed to multiple sources. It is clear that al-Ālūsī has copied the *ḥadīths*, together with the mention of their multiple sources, from al-Suyūṭī. Al-Ālūsī indicates his specific contention with the Shī‘īs: they infer from these traditions that ‘Alī was to be the immediate successor to Muḥammad.⁷⁸³ Al-Ālūsī then offers a short as well as a long response to that claim. His

⁷⁸² Al-Shawkānī, p. 879.

⁷⁸³ Al-Ālūsī, vol. 8, pp. 154-55.

short response includes two arguments: first, Sunnīs do not grant that the said traditions are authentic; and second, there is nothing in the verse itself to indicate a specific guide. As we have seen above, al-Suyūṭī noted that his last tradition was judged by al-Ḥākim to be authentic. Al-Ālūsī also reproduced that note on the authenticity of the tradition. But he clarifies that, according to *ḥadīth* specialists, al-Ḥākim’s judgement is not worth considering.⁷⁸⁴

In his longer response, al-Ālūsī grants, for the sake of argument, that the traditions which point to ‘Alī as the guide are authentic. Al-Ālūsī then sets out to show that those traditions do not mean anything more than what Sunnīs already believe. According to al-Ālūsī, one can be a guide without being a caliph. Therefore, those traditions indicate only that ‘Alī was a guide; not that ‘Alī was to be Muḥammad’s immediate successor. Al-Ālūsī then adds a facetious argument. He argues that, according to Sunnī tradition, ‘Alī approved of, and willingly pledged allegiance to, the first three caliphs. Since Shī‘īs insist that ‘Alī was the guide, they should follow his example in accepting the validity of those caliphs. Finally, al-Ālūsī points out that the traditions do not present ‘Alī as the only guide; hence the traditions allow for the first three caliphs to be guides besides, or before, ‘Alī.⁷⁸⁵

In sum, al-Suyūṭī’s bold traditions in favour of ‘Alī as the guide mentioned in Qur’ān 13:7 have been accepted by neither al-Shawkānī nor al-Ālūsī. Al-Shawkānī was silent on those traditions. Al-Ālūsī denied their authenticity, their applicability to the

⁷⁸⁴ Al-Ālūsī, vol. 8, p. 155.

⁷⁸⁵ Al-Ālūsī, vol. 8, p. 155.

verse, and their sufficiency as evidence for the immediacy of ‘Alī’s caliphate. Yet in *al-Durr*, a Sunnī source, these traditions remain bold and uncontested. Shī‘īs could now point to these traditions in *al-Durr* as evidence for their sectarian exegesis of the verse.

6.4 The Seven Civil Wars

Thus I have shown al-Suyūfī’s penchant for traditions favouring ‘Alī, and his bold representation of ‘Alī as both *al-walī* and *al-hādī*. I turn now to demonstrate al-Suyūfī’s distaste for the Umayyad caliphs and for the civil wars that engrossed the early Muslims. Al-Suyūfī, alone of all the major classical exegetes, includes a *ḥadīth* warning against the seven *fitnahs* (civil wars).⁷⁸⁶

A short historical excursus will render the *ḥadīth*’s reference to seven *fitnahs* more readily understandable. The third caliph Uthman was assassinated in the year 35/656.⁷⁸⁷ ‘Alī subsequently left Medina for Kufa where his supporters declared him caliph. In the year 36/656, Muḥammad’s wife ‘Ā’ishah, daughter of Abū Bakr, marched against ‘Alī in what came to be called the Battle of the Camel.⁷⁸⁸ ‘Ā’ishah was joined by her sister’s husband al-Zubayr, and Ṭalḥah. But ‘Ā’ishah’s party was defeated. Ṭalḥah and al-Zubayr died in the battle. However, ‘Alī’s victory did not restore quietude in the region. Above the northern frontier, Mu‘āwiyah, the son of Abū Sufyān b. Ḥarb b.

⁷⁸⁶ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 12, pp. 238-39. The word *fitnah* has meanings ranging from temptation to civil strife. Various meanings fit different contexts. In some contexts the precise meaning of *fitnah* remains unclear. I will therefore retain the Arabic word.

⁷⁸⁷ On this early history see Patricia Crone, *God’s Rule: Government and Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004) pp. 19-24.

⁷⁸⁸ It was called the Battle of the Camel either because the fiercest battles were fought around the camel which ‘Ā’ishah rode, or because, subsequent to her defeat, she was sent riding her camel safely back to Medina.

Umayyah, had been governor since the era of ‘Umar, the second caliph. Mu‘āwiyah now ventured a claim to the caliphate, and, in the year 37/657, his forces met ‘Alī’s in the Battle of Şiffin. After heavy losses on both sides, and an attempt at arbitration, the battle was laid to rest. But the caliphate was cleft: ‘Alī reigned in Iraq; Mu‘āwiyah reigned in Syria. After ‘Alī’s death, his son al-Ḥasan was proclaimed caliph at Kufa. Within a few months of his reign, however, he retired from active politics following the stipulations of a peaceful settlement he reached with Mu‘āwiyah. When Mu‘āwiyah died, in the year 60/680, he was succeeded by his son Yazīd under whose auspices Muḥammad’s younger grandson al-Ḥusayn was slaughtered at Karbalā’. Hence has begun the Umayyad line of caliphs who would reign until they are overthrown by the ‘Abbāsids in the year 133/750. Meanwhile ‘Abdullāh, the son of al-Zubayr, having spurned Yazīd’s rule, had to flee Medina for his safety. He took refuge in the sanctuary of Mecca where, eventually, he proclaimed himself caliph after Yazīd’s premature demise in the year 64/683.

With that historical picture before us, we turn now to the details of al-Suyūṭī’s *ḥadīth* on the seven *fitnahs*. I could find this *ḥadīth* in no other *tafsīr* whether Sunnī, Shī‘ī, or Ṣūfī. Al-Suyūṭī cites the *ḥadīth* from al-Ḥākim, adding that the latter had declared it authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*). The *ḥadīth* is related on the authority of Ibn Mas‘ūd who quotes Muḥammad as warning of a *fitnah* coming from Medina; another at Mecca; one each approaching from Yemen, Damascus, the East, and the West (al-Maghrib); and yet another from the navel (*baṭn*) of Syria.⁷⁸⁹ Muḥammad offers no details about these *fitnahs*

⁷⁸⁹ The *fitnah* at Mecca is precisely said to be “at Mecca” whereas the others come from the direction (*min qibal*) of the locations indicated. The reason for Mecca’s *fitnah* to be described as being local will become clear below.

except to specify that the one from the navel of Syria will be the Sufyānī *fitnah*.⁷⁹⁰

Therefore it is clear that a descendant of Abū Sufyān will be the perpetrator of that *fitnah*.⁷⁹¹ Ibn Mas‘ūd adds that the first of these *fitnahs* will be witnessed by some of his listeners; and that there will be Muslims still in existence to witness the last *fitnah*. One of the tradents, the otherwise unknown al-Walīd b. ‘Ayyāsh, adds more specific information:

The *fitnah* of Medina was on the part of (*min qibal*) Ṭalḥah and al-Zubayr; that of Mecca was the *fitnah* of Ibn al-Zubayr; the *fitnah* of Damascus was on the part of the Banu Umayyah (the Umayyads); and the *fitnah* of the East is on the part of these people.⁷⁹²

The narrator, al-Walīd b. ‘Ayyāsh, did not specify the people referred to as the perpetrators of the *fitnah* from the East.⁷⁹³ It is most likely a reference to the ‘Abbāsids who moved the caliphate eastward from Damascus to Baghdad. Kufa is notably absent

⁷⁹⁰ The epithet al-Sufyānī is a relative adjective derived from the name Abū Sufyān, and hence refers to one of his descendants. As we will see below, the epithet refers particularly to an eschatological warrior whose army, marching against a man in Mecca, will be swallowed up in an earthquake. In some traditions, the unnamed man at Mecca appears to be ‘Abdullāh b. Zubayr; in other traditions, the man is the futuristic Mahdī.

⁷⁹¹ The particular descendant of Abū Sufyān who fits the prophecy remains unsettled. Over time, the prophecy has evolved, and the traditions expressing the prophecy have been modified. At least two persons have been given the epithet “al-Sufyānī”: Abū Muḥammad al-Sufyānī who rose against the ‘Abbāsids in 133/751; and Abū al-‘Amayṭar who did likewise in 195/811. See Wilferd Madelung, “al-Sufyānī,” in *EI*², vol. XII, p. 754. A modification of the prophecy even speaks of there being two Sufyānīs. See Madelung, “The Sufyānī between Tradition and History,” in *Studia Islamica*, No. 63 (1986), pp. 5-48, p. 24.

⁷⁹² Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 12, pp. 238-39.

⁷⁹³ It is not easy to situate al-Walīd b. ‘Ayyāsh historically and hence to determine which *fitnah* he witnessed. But the early ‘Abbāsīd era is clear from the following lines of enquiry. Al-Suyūṭī cites the tradition from al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī’s *al-Mustadrak alā al-ṣaḥīḥayn*, vol. 4, p. 515. In that source, al-Walīd b. ‘Ayyāsh is identified as the brother of Abū Bakr b. ‘Ayyāsh. According to al-Safādī, *al-Wāfi bi-l-wafayāt*, in *al-Marjī*, Abū Bakr b. ‘Ayyāsh died in the same year as the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (d. 193/808). The *isnād* provided by al-Ḥākim places al-Walīd b. ‘Ayyāsh two generations after ‘Alqamah (d. 62/681) and two generations before Nu‘aym b. Hammād (d. 227/842). Meanwhile, the son of ‘Ayyāsh whom Madelung identified as being in the chain of narrators of traditions dealing with the Sufyānī is Ismā‘īl b. ‘Ayyāsh (d. 181-2/797/8). See Wilferd Madelung, “The Sufyānī,” p. 17.

from the list of *fitnah*-producing locations. ‘Alī is spared blame, but the other major agents of the early dissensions are all culpable. Al-Suyūṭī’s inclusion of this *ḥadīth* not only betrays his affinity with ‘Alī, but also his intense interest in early Muslim internecine feuds. Given the genealogical nature of Qur’ān exegesis, it is to be expected that such a piece of information, once introduced into the *tafsīr* stream, would flow into subsequent works.⁷⁹⁴ Yet no exegete other than al-Suyūṭī was willing to parade a *ḥadīth* that so boldly names names. Even those exegetes who normally copy *al-Durr* avoided copying this *ḥadīth*. Hence *al-Durr* remains remarkably unique for its biting political commentary.

Qur’ān 34:51 is the verse to which al-Suyūṭī appends the *ḥadīth* on the seven *fitnahs*.⁷⁹⁵ At this location in his exegesis al-Suyūṭī also includes a large number of other traditions containing predictions of, and commentary on, the early political dissensions among Muslims. Some of these traditions are echoed in other *tafsīrs*, but with limitations which we are about to observe. Judging from formal features, it appears at first glance that al-Ṭabarī included three *ḥadīths* on the Sufyānī. On closer inspection of the contents of those *ḥadīths*, however, it is evident that al-Ṭabarī has, in effect, presented only one *ḥadīth* and two notes on the authenticity of that *ḥadīth*. In the *ḥadīth*, Muḥammad speaks of a *fitnah* that will exist between the people of the East and al-Maghrib. While the two sides are embroiled in their strife, the Sufyānī will descend upon Damascus.⁷⁹⁶ Then he will send off two armies: one to the East, and the other to Medina. The first will go as far

⁷⁹⁴ On the genealogical nature of Qur’ān exegesis, see Saleh, *Formation*, pp. 11, 14-15.

⁷⁹⁵ We will consider the contents of this verse below.

⁷⁹⁶ I follow Madelung in referring to al-Sufyānī as ‘the Sufyānī.’ See above, note 791.

as Babylon, killing more than three thousand persons, and ripping open more than a hundred women. Significantly, they will also slaughter three hundred ‘Abbāsīd leaders. Then they will descend on Kufa destroying everything around it. Then they will go up to Syria, but the army carrying the flag of guidance from Kufa will catch up to them and decimate them. Meanwhile, the Sufyānī’s other army will plunder Medina and then head down to Mecca. But while they are on open ground, God will send Gabriel with the mandate to crush them. Gabriel will thus stamp them with a single step, and God will cause the earth to swallow them. According to that *ḥadīth*, the above prophecies explain the verse in question: “If you could only see when they will be terrified, for there will be no escape” (Qur’ān 34:51). None will be spared but two men whose purpose is to inform others of that dreadful event.⁷⁹⁷

According to the first part of the *isnād* which al-Ṭabarī provides for the above *ḥadīth*, Sufyān (al-Thawrī) b. Sa’īd informed Rawwād b. al-Jarrāḥ who informed his son ‘Iṣām who informed al-Ṭabarī.⁷⁹⁸ However, mockery is made of that *isnād* in the first note which al-Ṭabarī appended to that *ḥadīth*. According to that note, a certain Muḥammad b. Khalaf al-‘Asqalānī asks Rawwād: “Did you hear it from al-Thawrī?” Rawwād said, “No.” Muḥammad pressed on, “So, you read it to him?” Rawwād again answered in the negative. Muḥammad persists, “So, it was read to him in your presence?” Rawwād denied even that. Asked to clarify how the *ḥadīth* gains circulation in his name, Rawwād explains: “Some people came to me saying that they have a wonderful *ḥadīth* which they would like to read for me to hear. I agreed. Then they went about circulating

⁷⁹⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 22, pp. 127-28.

⁷⁹⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 22, pp. 127.

the *ḥadīth* on my authority.”⁷⁹⁹ Nonetheless, from al-Ṭabarī’s second note, it is evident that Muḥammad b. Khalaf continued to search for a dependable *isnād* for that *ḥadīth*. He informs al-Ṭabarī that he heard the *ḥadīth* through another oral and one written chain leading back to al-Thawrī.⁸⁰⁰ Hence the *ḥadīth* was ridiculed by the first note but esteemed by the second note. Nonetheless, al-Ṭabarī in his final analysis completely ignores the *ḥadīth* and the related prediction about the Sufyānī.⁸⁰¹

However, disregarding the *ḥadīth* is not the same as disparaging it. Ibn Kathīr would later express his shock that al-Ṭabarī failed to decisively dismiss the *ḥadīth* which predicts that an army will sink in the earth during the ‘Abbāsīd era.⁸⁰² He writes that al-Ṭabarī’s *ḥadīth* is completely false (*mawḍū’ bi-l-kullīyah*). Expressing his disappointment with al-Ṭabarī’s silence on the spuriousness of the tradition, Ibn Kathīr writes: “This is really strange behaviour on his part (*wa hādihā ‘ajīb ghārīb minhu*).”⁸⁰³ In sum, Ibn Kathīr did not subscribe to the politicizing of Qur’ān 34:51. For al-Suyūṭī, however, the gauntlet had been dropped: Al-Suyūṭī could not let Ibn Kathīr’s challenge to the *ḥadīth* pass. He had to now display the full arsenal of *ḥadīths* on the subject.

Evidently, al-Suyūṭī has gone out of his way to overawe his readers with a large stock of traditions on the Sufyānī. After offering a number of *ḥadīths* dealing with other interpretations of Qur’ān 34:51, al-Suyūṭī defended the political interpretation of that

⁷⁹⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 22, pp. 128.

⁸⁰⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 22, pp. 128.

⁸⁰¹ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 22, pp. 129.

⁸⁰² Ibn Kathīr, vol. 6, p. 2900.

⁸⁰³ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 6, p. 2900.

verse with another eighteen *ḥadīths*. Of these eighteen *ḥadīths*, the last one is the same as al-Ṭabarī's *ḥadīth* on the Sufyānī. Al-Suyūṭī's seventeenth *ḥadīth* is the one dealing with the seven *fitnahs* as seen above. In the course of presenting these *ḥadīths* al-Suyūṭī cites the *ḥadīth* collections of Ahmad, Ibn Abī Shaybah, al-Bukhārī, and Muslim. Al-Suyūṭī cites the exegetes 'Abd b. Ḥumayd, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Ibn al-Mundhir, and Ibn Mardawayh. Al-Suyūṭī appeals to early authorities among the companions of the prophet: Hudhayfah b. al-Yamān, Abū Hurayrah, and Ibn 'Abbās. Moreover, al-Suyūṭī appeals to some of Muḥammad's wives: Umm Salmah, Ṣafīyah, Ḥafṣah, and 'Ā'ishah. By mentioning such a conglomeration of authorities supporting the group of traditions, al-Suyūṭī's purpose is obviously to respond to Ibn Kathīr who deprecated the authenticity of al-Ṭabarī's tradition.

The authenticity of the individual traditions within the group is another matter. Madelung has argued that *ḥadīths* on the Sufyānī evolved through several stages which are no longer simple to demarcate, but can only be described in broad outlines. Some *ḥadīths* initially showed that Ibn al-Zubayr was receiving pledges of allegiance in Mecca, while Yazīd was mustering an army against him. Under these circumstances, *ḥadīths* were put into circulation by Ibn al-Zubayr and his supporters presaging the ill fate of Yazīd's army. Such *ḥadīths* were put into circulation with a twofold aim: to boost the morale of Ibn al-Zubayr's supporters; and to discourage anyone from joining Yazīd's army. But when no such army perished in the desert, those *ḥadīths* received gradual modifications serving to place the predicted conflict further and further into the future.⁸⁰⁴

⁸⁰⁴ Wilferd Madelung, "Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr and the Maḥdī," in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 40 no. 4 (1981), pp. 291-305, p. 293.

Al-Suyūṭī's *ḥadīths* contain a range of statements conforming to the broad outlines given by Madelung. In what follows I will number the *ḥadīths* from one to eighteen and refer to them within parentheses. 'Abdullāh b. al-Zubayr and his supporters in Mecca put into circulation *ḥadīths* about the quake to discourage others from joining Yazīd's army. In this vein, some of al-Suyūṭī's *ḥadīths* depict a man seeking sanctuary in the sacred city (8 and 11). To add to their abomination, the army is not marching only against the man, but against Mecca (18); the army is aiming at the very house of God (9, 10, and 14). It is the Sufyānī who sends an army against that man (1, 16, 17, and 18). The Sufyānī's maternal uncles are of the Banū Kalb (12). To Madelung, this is a further identifier of Yazīd.⁸⁰⁵ The army will come from Syria (12), from the depths of Damascus (16). Not all members of the army have the same intention. Indeed, some are forced to join. They will all suffer in this world, but on Judgement Day each man will be resurrected according to what he had intended (8, 9, 10, and 11). Hence those who joined Yazīd's army, for whatever reason, are forewarned of being punished, at least in the imminent earthquake.

However, no such earthquake occurred. The army first marched to Medina, then south towards Mecca, but abandoned their mission upon receiving news of Yazīd's untimely death.⁸⁰⁶ In the light of this historical outcome, the prophecy had to be modified so as to push the prophesied events into the future. *Ḥadīths* now in circulation depict the man in Mecca as the futuristic Mahdī. Yet al-Suyūṭī's *ḥadīths* hesitate to explicitly

⁸⁰⁵ Madelung, "The Sufyānī," p. 10. Yazīd's mother Maysūn was a sister of the Kalbī leader Ibn Baḥdal. See G.R. Hawting, "Yazīd b. Mu'āwiya," in *ET*², vol. 11, p. 309.

⁸⁰⁶ According to some reports, Yazīd was less than forty years old at the time of his death in 64/683. See Hawting, "Yazīd b. Mu'āwiya," p. 309.

identify that figure as the Mahdī. According to two of al-Suyūṭī's *ḥadīths*, allegiance will be pledged to the unidentified man between the *ka'bah*'s corner stone and the station of Abraham (12 and 15). The hordes of Iraq and the *abdāl* (spiritual savants) of Syria will flock to him (12).⁸⁰⁷ And the inhabitants of heaven and earth will be pleased with him (15). However, in al-Suyūṭī's sixteenth *ḥadīth*, Muḥammad specifically says of the man at Mecca, "He will be a man of my house (*raǰulun min ahli baytī*)."⁸⁰⁸ That is definitely not a description of 'Abdullāh, the son of al-Zubayr. We will see below that al-Ālūsī takes this tradition as a reference to the Mahdī to appear at the end of the ages.

Whereas al-Suyūṭī's sixteenth *ḥadīth* turns attention away from Ibn al-Zubayr, the seventeenth *ḥadīth*, on the seven *fitnahs*, specifically identifies Ibn al-Zubayr as the *fitnah* at Mecca. Moreover, that *ḥadīth*, implicates many of the major political figures in the early part of the *ummah* including Ṭalḥah, al-Zubayr, and the Banū Umayyah. With that *ḥadīth*, al-Suyūṭī, has boldly situated the said conflicts among the early Muslims, and has thus betrayed his passion for the political interpretation of Qur'ān 34:51.

In sum, other *tafsīrs* that do mention the Sufyānī tend to mention no more than a few traditions on the subject. Al-Ṭabarī, we will recall, presented one *ḥadīth* in favour of the belief, then appended two notes: one lampooning the authenticity of the *ḥadīth*; the other reaffirming the *ḥadīth*. Ibn Kathīr found al-Ṭabarī's *ḥadīth* too abhorrent to reproduce, but referred to it only to register his perplexity over al-Ṭabarī's tolerance for

⁸⁰⁷ The *abdāl* refer, in Ṣūfism, to such spiritual savants for whose sake God preserves the world. The title *abdāl* derives from the verb *abdala* (he replaced). The *abdāl* are so called because it is believed that when such a savant dies God replaces him with another. In his exegesis of Qur'ān 2:251, al-Suyūṭī proves, on the basis of several *ḥadīths*, the existence of a large number of such savants in Syria. See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, pp. 156-160.

⁸⁰⁸ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 12, p. 238.

it. In sharp contrast with these exegeses, *al-Durr* includes as many as eighteen traditions on the subject of the Sufyānī thus betraying al-Suyūṭī’s predisposition for political interpretation. It is al-Suyūṭī’s inclusion of his *ḥadīth* on the seven *fitnahs*, however, that renders *al-Durr* singularly unique among other exegetical works.

Al-Suyūṭī’s willingness to connect Qur’ān 34:51 with early Muslim politics is even more surprising when the verse is looked at closely, for it is devoid of political connotations. Whereas al-Ṭabarī’s *ḥadīth* had already forged a connection between the Sufyānī and Qur’ān 34:51, that connection is extremely tenuous. The tenuousness of that connection will become evident when the verse is read together with the three verses that follow it. Qur’ān 34:51-54 reads:

If you could only see their terror when they are seized from a nearby place; for there will be no escape. They will say, “Now we believe in it.” But how can they reach it from a distant place after a barrier has been placed between them and what they desire—just as was done with their kind before? They denied it in the past, and proffered conjectures from a far-off place. They were deep in doubt and suspicion.⁸⁰⁹

Those are the final words of the Qur’ān’s 34th *sūrah*. With that context in view, al-Ṭabarī’s eventual disregard for the political interpretation of Qur’ān 34:51 is understandable. In his concluding remarks on the exegesis of that verse, al-Ṭabarī writes that the verse is addressed to Muḥammad, and it serves as a warning to the disbelieving polytheists from among Muḥammad’s people. That interpretation, al-Ṭabarī maintains, is based on the context of the verse and the literal wording of its text. As for context, the

⁸⁰⁹ Qur’ān 34:51-55, my trans. modified from that of Abdel Haleem. The addressee ‘you’ in the verse is singular, hence the exegetes presume that Muḥammad is being addressed. The first part of that address, “If you could only see their terror when they are seized from a nearby place,” is the protasis of a conditional sentence whose apodosis is not mentioned. As we will see below, al-Ṭabarī completes the sentence by supplying the following apodosis: “you will find them in terror when they witness the punishment of God and they find no way to save themselves or to escape from God.”

verses before Qur’ān 34:51 contain similar themes: the polytheists are warned of dire consequences following upon their rejection of the prophet’s pleadings. The present verse continues with the same theme. Al-Ṭabarī adds that the said interpretation is more likely than any suggestion that the verse refers to information about something that is not mentioned in its broader Qur’ānic context. In sum, al-Ṭabarī glosses the verse as follows: “Muḥammad, if you were to look at these polytheists from among your people you will find them in terror when they witness the punishment of God and they find no way to save themselves or to escape from God.”⁸¹⁰ As for the verse’s mention of a nearby place wherefrom the deniers will be seized, al-Ṭabarī writes: “Wherever they are, they are close to God, not far from him.”⁸¹¹

In view of al-Ṭabarī’s summation of the exegesis of Qur’ān 34:51, the political dimension attached to that verse in the *ḥadīth* is clearly forced. Yet al-Suyūṭī is not the first exegete to interpret the verse in the light of that *ḥadīth*. Muqātil b. Sulaymān and al-Tha’labī had already done so.⁸¹² Even so, al-Suyūṭī’s emphasis on political exegesis stands out in clear contrast to the approach of the other tradition-based exegetes: al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr. It remains for us now to observe how al-Suyūṭī’s exegesis of Qur’ān 34:51 influenced subsequent *tafsīrs*.

⁸¹⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 22, p. 129.

⁸¹¹ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 22, p. 129.

⁸¹² Al-Tha’labī presents two traditions. The first merely mentions that the verse refers to an earthquake in the desert. Al-Tha’labī’s second tradition is the same as al-Ṭabarī’s tradition on the Sufyānī. In fact, the first part of the *isnād* which al-Tha’labī supplied for the *ḥadīth* goes backwards from him to al-Ṭabarī, and the rest of that *isnād* is as already given by al-Ṭabarī. Al-Tha’labī does nothing to disparage the said *ḥadīth*, and thus acquiesces in the politicizing of Qur’ān 34:51. See al-Tha’labī, vol. 5, p. 164; and Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr Muqātil b. Sulaymān*, vol. 3, p. 70.

Al-Shawkānī's exegesis of Qur'ān 34:51 is a combination of the related exegeses given by al-Ṭabarī and al-Suyūṭī, except that the Sufyānī army is now nameless.⁸¹³ Al-Shawkānī absorbed three interpretations of the verse from al-Ṭabarī: the verse either predicts the defeat of the polytheists in the Battle of Badr, or their regret on the Day of Resurrection, or the sinking of the army. Al-Shawkānī absorbed another two interpretations from *al-Durr*. First, the verse warns the polytheists of the terror they will experience at the time of death. Second, the verse warns them of the horror they will experience while in their graves as they hear the shout precipitating the resurrection. Al-Shawkānī has split that last interpretation into two separate interpretations: the horror in the graves; and the horror at the onset of the resurrection. Hence al-Shawkānī provides a total of six interpretations some of which are so closely related to others that their delineation appears pedantic.

However, while mentioning the sinking of the army, al-Shawkānī is careful to avoid any mention of the Sufyānī. Hence the provenance of the army cannot be known from al-Shawkānī's exegesis. In this way al-Shawkānī straddles the border between his Zaydī heritage and his Salafī leanings. Zaydīs would readily criticize the Umayyads, considering them enemies of 'Alī and his family. On the other hand, Salafīs would maintain silence in the face of the bloody conflicts that engulfed the utopian Muslim community. To support the notion of the sinking of the army, the *ḥadīth* which al-Shawkānī cites is al-Suyūṭī's fourth, the one that goes back to the authority of Sa'īd b. Jubayr.⁸¹⁴ That *ḥadīth* does not mention the Sufyānī. Hence it is clear that from among al-

⁸¹³ Al-Shawkānī, pp. 1444-45.

⁸¹⁴ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 12, p. 234; al-Shawkānī, pp. 1445.

Suyūṭī's eighteen traditions regarding that army, al-Shawkānī has carefully selected a tradition that circumvents political commentary. Within the context of al-Shawkānī's exegesis, the *ḥadīth* can now only mean that an army of the Meccan polytheists who were the first addressees of Muḥammad must have been swallowed up somewhere in a desert. Thus al-Shawkānī has cleverly avoided commenting on the political ramifications of the early part of the Muslim *ummah*.

The boldness of al-Suyūṭī's political commentary becomes all the more evident as we compare the attitudes of the various exegetes towards the prophecy about the sunken army. Al-Ṭabarī was apathetic towards the premonition about the sinking of the Sufyānī army. Later on, Ibn Kathīr was appalled by the premonition. Subsequently, al-Suyūṭī defended it. Finally, al-Shawkānī accepts the prophecy provided that it stops short of mentioning the Sufyānī provenance of the army. The fact that al-Suyūṭī was willing to name the army, whereas al-Shawkānī was not so willing, is related to the positioning of the two exegetes vis-a-vis the traditionalists. Al-Shawkānī needed to demonstrate his traditionalism to those Sunnīs who remained suspicious of his Zaydī ancestry. On the other hand, al-Suyūṭī's traditionalism had been proven by his numerous works. Moreover, if challenged, he was ever ready to launch a personal defence calling upon his mastery of traditions. But even al-Suyūṭī had to adopt a strategy: he let the traditions speak instead of his own voice. It was dangerous to be perceived as being subversive to the idealization of the early Muslim leaders.

As for al-Ālūsī, in his exegesis of Qur'ān 34:51 he is clearly dependent on al-Suyūṭī. He summarizes the five interpretations which al-Suyūṭī appended to the verse,

copying here and there a *ḥadīth* each in support of the various interpretations.⁸¹⁵ When he came to choose a *ḥadīth* on the Sufyānī army, however, he seized upon al-Suyūṭī's sixteenth. That is the one which most clearly cannot refer to ʿAbdullāh b. Zubayr since it specifies that the otherwise unidentified man at Mecca is from Muḥammad's family. On the basis of that *ḥadīth*, al-Ālūsī states explicitly that the man at Mecca is the Mahdī who will appear at the end of time (*yaẓharu al-mahdī fī ākhir al-zamān*).⁸¹⁶

Thus we see the interesting outcome that from the stock of al-Suyūṭī's eighteen traditions on the prophesied warrior, al-Shawkānī and al-Ālūsī each selected a different *ḥadīth*—each a *ḥadīth* that allows them to avoid commenting on the political upheavals that afflicted the early Muslims. Al-Shawkānī avoided mention of the Sufyānī; al-Ālūsī mentioned the Sufyānī, but placed him at the end of the ages when he will appear as one of the Mahdī's opponents.⁸¹⁷ The *ḥadīth* corpus is large enough for writers of various persuasions to find therein the proof texts they need. It turns out that al-Suyūṭī's selection of eighteen traditions here is likewise large enough to allow for al-Shawkānī and al-Ālūsī to downsize it in two different directions. Finally, apart from al-Suyūṭī, no major Qurʾān commentator dared to mention the *ḥadīth* on the seven *fitnahs*. *Al-Durr*'s inclusion of that *ḥadīth*, and the seventeen additional *ḥadīths*, reveals al-Suyūṭī's unparalleled interest in criticizing early Muslim political dissenters.

⁸¹⁵ Al-Ālūsī, vol. 12, pp. 230-31.

⁸¹⁶ Al-Ālūsī, vol. 12, p. 231.

⁸¹⁷ The other notorious opponent of the Mahdī will be the Antichrist.

6.5 Summary

Sunnīs generally accept the caliphs in their historical order starting with Abū Bakr; but Shīʿīs regret that an ideal order of caliphs that would have begun with ʿAlī and remained among his descendants did not materialize. Sunnīs and Shīʿīs each needed to prove to the other the correctness of their own doctrine, and so appealed to Qurʾānic passages together with tendentious exegeses of the same. Hence exegetical traditions supporting sectarian claims soon arose. It is not entirely surprising that some pro-Shīʿī traditions found their way into Sunnī works. Sunnīs acquiesce in the duty to love ʿAlī and his family, and, more generally, the prophet’s family. Consequently, they tended to accept those traditions which extolled the virtues of ʿAlī provided that such traditions stopped short of nominating him as Muḥammad’s immediate successor. Being a Ṣūfī, al-Suyūfī had an additional reason for favouring such traditions. Most paths of transmission of Ṣūfī spiritual authority, when traced backwards, culminate in ʿAlī.⁸¹⁸ Going beyond what these factors would prepare us to expect, however, al-Suyūfī’s exegesis betrays an exceptional degree of interest in promoting the position of ʿAlī. In his exegesis of Qurʾān 5:67, al-Suyūfī, though neither al-Ṭabarī nor Ibn Kathīr, included two traditions notable for their value in Shīʿī polemics. The first tradition indicates that at the pool of Khumm Muḥammad pronounced ʿAlī as the patron of Muslims. According to the second tradition, Muslims in Muḥammad’s era used to recite Qurʾān 5:67 inclusive of a clause acknowledging ʿAlī as the patron of Muslims. The exposure al-Suyūfī granted these

⁸¹⁸ The notable exception is the Naqshabandī *ṭarīqah* which derives its authority through Abū Bakr, the first caliph. See Itzhak Weismann, *The Naqshabandiyya: Orthodoxy and Activism in a Worldwide Ṣūfī Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2007) p. 11. As indicated in my first chapter, al-Suyūfī was of the Shādhilī *ṭarīqah*.

traditions increased after they were copied by both al-Shawkānī and al-Ālūsī. Al-Ālūsī, unable to impeach the traditions, resorted to showing how they could be interpreted within Sunnī parameters.

Likewise in his exegesis of Qur'ān 13:7 al-Suyūṭī included five traditions showing that 'Alī is the guide of Muslims. His work is in sharp contrast with that of al-Ṭabarī who mentioned one such *ḥadīth* but subsequently denied it a voice in his summation of the verse's meaning. Ibn Kathīr mentioned al-Ṭabarī's *ḥadīth* only to disparage it and to replace it with a related tradition which fails to denote 'Alī as the said guide. Al-Suyūṭī's exegesis of Qur'ān 13:7 is obviously intended as a riposte to the treatment of the tradition by al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr. Al-Suyūṭī's traditions are more numerous, backed by multiple authorities, and clearly indicative of 'Alī's role as the guide of Muslims. But al-Suyūṭī's innovation here was too bold for both al-Shawkānī and al-Ālūsī. Al-Shawkānī on this occasion refused to copy al-Suyūṭī's traditions. Al-Ālūsī, never to miss an opportunity for anti-Shī'ī polemics, composed a response to al-Suyūṭī's traditions. *Al-Durr* thus remains unique in its promotion of 'Alī at this verse location as well. A further analysis of the exegeses of other verses, for example Qur'ān 5:55, will show that, again and again, al-Suyūṭī surpasses other tradition-based exegetes in favouring 'Alī.

Given the clashes between 'Alī and his family on the one hand and the Umayyad caliphs on the other, praise for 'Alī is compatible with disparagement of the Umayyads. Hence it is not surprising that, while endorsing 'Alī, al-Suyūṭī would discredit the Umayyads. Al-Suyūṭī has another reason to censure the Umayyads, for he favours the

ʿAbbāsids as the ideal caliphs.⁸¹⁹ Yet al-Suyūṭī discredits the Umayyads to an astonishing degree. Space does not permit here the study of every location at which al-Suyūṭī denigrates the Umayyads.⁸²⁰ In his commentary on Qurʾān 34:51, al-Ṭabarī presented a *ḥadīth* about the sinking of a Sufyānī army. This is a reference to an army commissioned by an Umayyad leader. However, Ibn Kathīr impugned that *ḥadīth*. Subsequently, al-Suyūṭī took up the challenge to defend not only the authenticity of that *ḥadīth* but also the validity of the belief in the sunken Sufyānī army. Skilled in accumulating traditions, al-Suyūṭī gathered as many as eighteen traditions to bolster the belief in the said army’s receipt of divine disapproval.

One of al-Suyūṭī’s traditions registers contempt not only for the Umayyads, but also for Ṭalḥah and al-Zubayr who had joined ʿĀ’ishah in her revolt against ʿAlī. That *ḥadīth* speaks of seven *fitnahs*. It names as one such *fitnah* even the son of al-Zubayr. It was his claim to caliphate that the sunken Umayyad army had intended to crush. The *ḥadīth* uses the dismissive label *fitnah* to characterize many of the centres of early political activity and their representatives. However, ʿAlī and his center at Kufa are notably spared the censure of that tradition. At the comparable location in their *tafsīrs*, al-Shawkānī and al-Ālūsī each presented a tradition carefully selected to avoid politicizing the verse.

In his final analysis of Qurʾān 34:51, al-Ṭabarī disregards the belief in the Sufyānī army and the related *ḥadīth*. Al-Ṭabarī’s commentary shows that the target of God’s

⁸¹⁹ See Geoffroy, “Al-Suyūṭī,” in *ET*², vol. 9, p. 914.

⁸²⁰ Otherwise, we would demonstrate the same phenomenon occurring in al-Suyūṭī’s exegesis of Qurʾān 97:3 and 17:60. On the anti-Umayyad exegesis of the latter verse in tradition-based *tafsīrs* see Goldziher, p. 169.

wrath would have been Muḥammad's first addressees: the disbelieving Meccan polytheists. In the light of that analysis, Qur'ān 34:51 is completely unrelated to early Muslim internecine conflicts. Not to be discouraged by al-Ṭabarī's analysis, however, and offering none of his own, al-Suyūṭī used traditions to express his disdain for the early civil dissensions. No other exegete was willing to parade the *ḥadīth* on the seven *fitnahs* which so boldly names the protagonists of warring Muslim camps. It is thus evident that *al-Durr* is distinctive for its praise of 'Alī, its criticism of early civil dissenters, and its vituperation of the Umayyads. The politicizing of Qur'ānic verses, already observable in early exegeses, has reached its apogee in *al-Durr*.

Chapter 7

Variant Readings of the Qur'ān

7.1 Introduction

In the present chapter I identify another of al-Suyūṭī's purposes in composing *al-Durr al-Manthūr*: to gather traditions depicting extra-canonical readings of the Qur'ān. Al-Suyūṭī has included traditions on readings which were not mentioned in the tradition-based exegeses of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr before him. As we shall see, there is a historical explanation for al-Suyūṭī's interest in variant readings to be greater than that of either al-Ṭabarī or Ibn Kathīr. Over the centuries prior to al-Suyūṭī, Muslim scholars struggled to make sense of multiple readings of the Qur'ān. Al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) regarded variant readings as an inconvenience, if not an embarrassment. Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) accepted the canonicity of seven readings. Ibn al-Jazarī (d. 833/1429), however, argued for the canonicity of as many as ten readings.⁸²¹ More important, Ibn al-Jazarī argued that the ten readings are included in what God revealed to Muḥammad. Hence Ibn al-Jazarī afforded each of the ten readings equal authority. Al-Suyūṭī accepted Ibn al-Jazarī's argument. Hence al-Suyūṭī could comfortably mention such readings in his exegesis. With the work of Ibn al-Jazarī before him, al-Suyūṭī had an advantage that was not available to either al-Ṭabarī or Ibn Kathīr. I will elaborate on this history below to pave the way for an understanding of the data on variant readings which I will then

⁸²¹ Ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr fī-l-qirā'āt al-'ashr* (Beirut: Dar al Kotob al-Ilmiyah, 2002) pp. 48-50.

present from the various *tafsīrs*. We shall see that al-Suyūṭī developed a theory that allows him to welcome into his exegesis even readings beyond the ten.

7.1.1 The Exegetes' Attitudes towards Variant Readings

I will now account for the historical developments explaining the varied attitudes of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Suyūṭī towards the Qur'ān's multiple readings (*qirā'āt*). As Claude Gilliot explained, at the time of Muḥammad's demise Muslims possessed no standard authoritative text of the Qur'ān.⁸²² Their knowledge of the Qur'ān was based on memory assisted by complete or partial personal copies of the text. In the introduction to his exegesis, Ibn Kathīr gives a fairly standard Muslim account of the Qur'ān's collection and proliferation.⁸²³ Modern scholarship denies many aspects of that traditional account.⁸²⁴ But it is nevertheless presented here for the purpose of understanding the varying attitudes of Muslim exegetes towards variant readings. According to Muslim accounts, the Qur'ān was revealed to Muḥammad in short segments over the twenty-three years of his prophetic career. Whenever the piecemeal revelations were received, they were recorded on a variety of primitive writing materials, and memorized by Muḥammad's followers. Until Muḥammad's death (d. 11/632), a definitive copy of the Qur'ān could not be written since the Qur'ān was still in the process of being revealed, and a passage once revealed could be later repealed. Abū Bakr (d. 13/633), however,

⁸²² Claude Gilliot, "The Creation of a Fixed Text," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 41-58, p. 44.

⁸²³ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 54.

⁸²⁴ On the history of the Qur'ān's formation, see Harald Motzki, "Alternative Accounts of the Qur'ān's Formation," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 59-75.

during his brief caliphate, commissioned one of the Muḥammad's scribes, to compile the Qur'ān. Zayd b. Thābit thus collected the Qur'ān from disparate written pieces, and from the memories of men. Zayd then wrote the Qur'ān onto sheets (*ṣuḥuf*). The sheets were lodged with Abū Bakr, and, on his demise, transferred to the caliph 'Umar. Upon 'Umar's death, however, the sheets were not transferred to 'Uthmān, the next caliph, as might be expected. Rather, the sheets were deposited with 'Umar's daughter Ḥafṣah, Muḥammad's widow.

According to Muslim accounts, 'Uthmān borrowed the written sheets from Ḥafṣah, had Zayd transcribe them into several codices, and sent one each to various centres of Muslim learning.⁸²⁵ The sheets were returned to Ḥafṣah, and were destroyed only after her death (d. 45/665). Meanwhile, 'Uthmān ordered the burning of copies of the Qur'ān at variance with his newly authorized codices. Despite some initial resistance, most noteworthy from Ibn Mas'ūd, 'Uthmān's text was eventually received among Muslims as the sole written canon of the Qur'ān.⁸²⁶

Given this history, how would Muslim exegetes regard reports that Ibn Mas'ūd, Ubayy b. Ka'b, and other companions of Muḥammad read the Qur'ān in non-conformance with 'Uthmān's codices? Two doctrines at the disposal of the exegetes helped to make sense of this data: the doctrine of abrogation;⁸²⁷ and the doctrine that the

⁸²⁵ W. Montgomery Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ān* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1970) p. 42.

⁸²⁶ Fred Leemhuis, "From Palm Leaves to the Internet," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 145-62, p. 148.

⁸²⁷ See John Burton, "Abrogation," in *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān* (Leiden: Brill, 2001) vol. 1, pp. 11-19; John Burton, *The Sources of Islamic Law: Islamic Theories of Abrogation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990) pp. 43-48.

Qur'ān was revealed in seven modes (*ahruf*) all equally valid.⁸²⁸ Below I will outline some of the more significant explanations of the seven modes offered by Muslim exegetes. As for the doctrine of abrogation, the exegetes held that a verse of the Qur'ān once revealed may be repealed in one of three ways.

In the first type of abrogation, the mere application of the text is abolished. The result is that the verse continues to be recited as a part of the Qur'ān; but it carries no legal force. For example, Qur'ān 2:240 asserts a widow's right to maintenance and accommodation for a year following her husband's death. However, this ruling is widely held to be replaced by the inheritance laws of Qur'ān 4:12.⁸²⁹ In the second type of abrogation both the text and its application are withdrawn. The text in question thus occupies no position in the current Qur'ān, and has no influence on Muslim practice. However, reports about such texts persist in Muslim traditions. Some early Muslims were able to claim that large numbers of verses were abrogated in this way. For example, Qur'ān 33 now contains 73 verses; Qur'ān 2 has 286 verses; but a report claims that Qur'ān 33 once had as many verses as does Qur'ān 2.⁸³⁰ In the third type of abrogation, the text is revoked, yet it continues to have legal weight. The result is that an injunction is based on a verse that used to be, but is not anymore, a part of the Qur'ān. The penalty of

⁸²⁸ Goldziher, *Schools*, pp. 27-28. The word *ahruf* is the plural of *harf* which could indicate a letter of the alphabet, or a mode or an edge. I will use the translation 'mode,' for that translation will be most inclusive of the Muslim discussions of the concept.

⁸²⁹ Burton, "*Sources of Islamic Law*," p. 58.

⁸³⁰ Burton, "*Sources of Islamic Law*," p. 50.

death by stoning for adultery is an example of an injunction that is based on a withdrawn Qur'ānic verse.⁸³¹

Below we will encounter *ḥadīths* stating that certain readings have been abrogated. In general, however, an exegete could presume that a reading which is reported on good authority but is in conflict with 'Uthmān's codices has been abrogated. That presumption is based on the belief that Muḥammad used to rehearse the Qur'ān each Ramadan in the presence of the angel Gabriel. The exegetes assume that, in the final year, Muḥammad's rehearsal of the Qur'ān constituted the final version of the Qur'ān.⁸³² Zayd was presumed to be present during that last review. Hence, when Abū Bakr commissioned him to collect the scattered pieces of the revelation, Zayd knew what to collect and what to leave out. As for those verses which Muḥammad did not recite during the final annual review, Zayd excluded them from the first Qur'ānic collection and, subsequently, from 'Uthmān's codices. It is clear that the doctrine of abrogation is complicated.

The other doctrine, according to which the Qur'ān was revealed in seven *aḥruf*, is allusive. In the introduction to his *tafsīr*, al-Ṭabarī essayed an explanation for the *aḥruf*. Al-Ṭabarī explained that the seven modes referred to seven Arabic dialects.⁸³³ Hence a Qur'ānic statement may be expressed this way in one dialect, and that way in another, all sanctioned and controlled by divine guidance duly dispensed by Muḥammad. With such flexibility, God accommodated the single revelation to the seven dialects for the sole

⁸³¹ See John Burton, "Law and Exegesis: The Punishment for Adultery in Islam," in *Approaches to the Qur'ān*, ed. G.R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (London: Routledge, 1993) 269-84, p. 282.

⁸³² Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, pp. 78-79.

⁸³³ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 1, p. 35.

purpose of facilitating the revelation's reception and recitation among the various Arab tribes.

Al-Ṭabarī explained further that, eventually, opposition to the Qur'ān dwindled as the various tribes flocked to Islam, and the Qur'ān became familiar to everyone. The early facility now proved not only superfluous but confusing. Some Muslims, not knowing that they were thus denying the very Book of God, began to anathematize the genuine readings of other Muslims. It was with the aim of curbing such confusion among Muslims that 'Uthmān now dispensed with the early facility. According to al-Ṭabarī, then, the 'Uthmānic text was written in the dialect of the Quraysh, Muḥammad's tribe.⁸³⁴ Hence, if a reading has excellent credentials but departs from the 'Uthmānic codex, al-Ṭabarī would label and delimit it as one of the six *aḥruf* which were abrogated by 'Uthmān's act of codifying the Qur'ān.⁸³⁵

Al-Ṭabarī's explanation does not make sense of all the facts on hand. For example, some of the canonical readings, including that of the Kūfan 'Āṣim (d. 127/745), pronounce the *hamzah*, the glottal stop, a feature foreign to the Qurayshī dialect.⁸³⁶ Al-Ṭabarī is aware that the text of 'Uthmān can support a variety of surviving readings. But since he deems six of the seven *aḥruf* to be cancelled, he finds inconvenient even those variant readings which are backed by reputable authorities and conform to the 'Uthmānic codex. Hence we will see that whenever al-Ṭabarī analyses a given variety of readings he attempts to identify the single genuine reading among them.

⁸³⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 1, p. 34.

⁸³⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 1, p. 35.

⁸³⁶ Al-Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī*, ed. Sālīm Mustafā al-Badrī (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah, 2000) p. 33.

While Muslim scholars were still struggling to understand the relationship between the seven *aḥruf* and the several surviving reading traditions, al-Ṭabarī's younger contemporary Ibn Mujāhid (d. 324/936) composed a monograph on seven readings.⁸³⁷ Ibn Mujāhid traced each of the seven readings back to a prominent reader from the second Islamic century—a reader who was associated with one of the cities to which 'Uthmān reportedly sent a copy of his codex. But Muslim scholars fault Ibn Mujāhid for choosing precisely seven readings, since that number is the same as the number of modes in which the Qur'ān was revealed.⁸³⁸ The work thus gives the impression to common folk that the seven readings are the same as the seven *aḥruf*.⁸³⁹ With such a false impression, the masses are again in the same danger from which, according to al-Ṭabarī, 'Uthmān had rescued them. Misled to consider Ibn Mujāhid's seven readings as comprising the entirety of the Qur'ānic revelation, the common folk stand to condemn other genuine readings backed by impressive chains of authorities.

Nonetheless, with Ibn Mujāhid's work the seven readings achieved a new level of prominence. It soon became common for these seven readings to be regarded as being multiply attested (*mutawātir*) and hence of unquestionable authenticity. Of the seven, that of the Kūfan 'Āṣim (d. 127/745) as transmitted by the Ḥafṣ (d. 180/796) now enjoys international circulation after it was adopted by the Ottoman Empire. That reading became the basis of the Cairo edition which was published in 1342/1924. In academic writings generally, and in the present work, references to the Qur'ān are to the Cairo

⁸³⁷ Ibn Mujāhid, *Kitāb al-sab'ah fī al-qirā'āt*, ed. Shawqī Ḍayf (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1972).

⁸³⁸ Al-Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, vol. 1, pp. 215-16.

⁸³⁹ Al-Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, vol. 1, p. 215.

edition.⁸⁴⁰ Another of the seven readings is available in print—that of the Medinan Nāfi‘ (d. 169/785), as transmitted by Warsh (d. 197/812). But it enjoys popularity mainly in North-West Africa.⁸⁴¹

Whereas the masses are content with knowing which readings are authoritative, however, the scholars continued to search for a satisfying explanation of the *aḥruf*. In the introduction to his exegesis, al-Qurṭubī mentioned that other Muslim savants had given as many as thirty-five different views on the concept of *aḥruf*.⁸⁴² Al-Qurṭubī then presented five of those views.⁸⁴³ First, the idea conveyed by a Qur’ānic verse may be expressed variously using as many as seven synonyms. Second, the same statement may be expressed variously in accordance with seven specific Arabic dialects. Third, as in the previous view, the seven modes are seven dialects, but only the dialects of the Muḍar tribes, not the dialects of other Arab tribes. In either case the Quraysh, the prophet’s tribe is included. Fourth, there are seven types of variations among the various readings including variations in letters, variations in words, additions and deletions. Fifth, the seven modes refer to seven genres of Qur’ānic statements, including prescriptions, exhortations, stories, arguments, and parables. Al-Qurṭubī then adds that this fifth explanation is weak, since the genres of statements it mentions are essential to the Qur’ān

⁸⁴⁰ For a history of the publication of the Qur’ān see Deroche, “Written Transmission,” pp. 183-84; Leemhuis, “From Palm Leaves,” p. 151-52.

⁸⁴¹ For a study of the variations between these two printed editions see Adrian Brockett, “The Value of the Ḥafṣ and Warsh Transmissions for the Textual History of the Qur’ān,” in Andrew Rippin, *Approaches to the History of the Interpretations of the Qur’ān* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) pp. 32-45.

⁸⁴² Al-Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī*, ed. Sālim Muṣṭafā al-Badrī (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah, 2000) vol. 1, p. 31-32.

⁸⁴³ Al-Qurṭubī, vol. 1, p. 32-35.

and cannot be specific to the *aḥruf*. Ibn Kathīr replicated al-Qurṭubī's discussion.⁸⁴⁴ In the light of these conflicting views, it is obvious that Muslim scholars attempted to arrive at a definition of *aḥruf* in hindsight, mainly by observing the wide variety of variations reported in the readings of early authorities.

After the proliferation of the 'Uthmānic codices, the additions and deletions of words as noted in the fourth explanation of *aḥruf* above could no longer be sustained. As for the other types of variations mentioned above, those which conformed to any of 'Uthmān's codices continued to survive in the oral reading traditions. That 'Uthmān's codices could accommodate such variations was due to one minor reason and two major reasons. As for the minor reason, the copies commissioned by 'Uthmān were not completely identical.⁸⁴⁵ Some peculiarities noted in the readings associated with certain centres of Islamic learning were credited to slight variations in copies of the codex associated with the same centres. Hence Muslim scholars insist that one of the criteria for a canonical reading is its conformity with one of the codices of 'Uthmān.⁸⁴⁶ The variations are so slight, however, that it will often prove convenient in the present work to refer to the text of 'Uthmān as though it were a single codex.

We shall now consider the two main factors allowing variant readings to find a basis in the 'Uthmānic codices. First, the codices were written in a *scripta defectiva*.⁸⁴⁷ Eighteen graphemes were made to represent the twenty-eight letters of the Arabic

⁸⁴⁴ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, pp. 73-75.

⁸⁴⁵ For examples of variations between the codices see Ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr*, p. 16.

⁸⁴⁶ Ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr*, p. 15.

⁸⁴⁷ Francois Deroche, "Written Transmission," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006) 172-86, p. 175.

alphabet.⁸⁴⁸ Diacritical marks were already available for the purpose of distinguishing the various letters which could be represented by an identical grapheme.⁸⁴⁹ But such marks are absent from the earliest known copies of the Qur'ān. Second, the codices did not include indicators of short vowels and of some long vowels.⁸⁵⁰ In the absence of diacritical marks and vowel indicators, a given word could easily be mistaken for another. Active, passive, and imperative forms of verbs can be easily confused. However the developing reading traditions did not accept all such theoretical variations. Some variations were rejected, sometimes on pain of punishment, and survive as notes in *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, or other sources of Islamic traditions.⁸⁵¹ It is therefore necessary to keep in mind the distinction between the canonical text of 'Uthmān, canonical readings of that text, and non-canonical readings of the same text.

Ibn Mujāhid's seven readings, varied as they are from each other, all conform to the 'Uthmānic codices. Ibn Mujāhid's work therefore served as a convenient canon against which to measure the numerous readings which the codices could sustain. The convenience afforded by Ibn Mujāhid's work can be seen in the *tafsīr* of Ibn Kathīr who would sometimes repudiate a reading on the basis that it does not belong among the seven. Yet Ibn Kathīr, following al-Qurṭubī on the matter, was clear that the seven

⁸⁴⁸ Sheila Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006) p. 8.

⁸⁴⁹ Manfred Kropp, *The Results of Contemporary Research on the Qur'ān* (Beirut: Orient-Institut, 2007) p. 4, n. 2; Deroche, "Written Transmission," p. 173.

⁸⁵⁰ The evolution of the *scripta plena* probably reached its pinnacle during the reign of the Umayyad caliph 'Abd al-Mālik (r. 65-86/685-705) while al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf was governor of Iraq (75-95/694-714). See Gilliot, "Creation," p. 48; Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, p. 48; Deroche, "Written," p. 175; and Leemhuis, "From Palm Leaves," p. 148.

⁸⁵¹ Goldziher, *Schools*, pp. 30-31. For a comprehensive source of variant readings see 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Khaṭīb, *Mu'jam al-qirā'āt* (Cairo: Dār Sa'd al-Dīn, 2002). See also Arthur Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'ān: The Old Codices* (Leiden: Brill, 1937).

readings (*qirā'āt*) are not the same as the seven *aḥruf*.⁸⁵² If a complete explanation of the *aḥruf* could not be found, it was a desideratum that an explanation be given to at least harmonize the *aḥruf* with the surviving *qirā'āt*.

Such a harmony was achieved by Ibn al-Jazarī who gave an explanation contrary to that of al-Ṭabarī. He argued that 'Uthmān, rather than drastically cancelling six modes of the revelation, attempted to accommodate of them as much as he could through the use of two devices. The first device is the very *scripta defectiva* discussed above. According to Ibn al-Jazarī, instead of giving rise to variants, the text was written to accommodate them.⁸⁵³ As for the the second device, 'Uthmān deliberately produced codices that were varied one from another. According to Ibn al-Jazarī, 'Uthmān thus intended that some readings which could not be accommodated on one consonantal ductus would find refuge in another. Hence, according to Ibn al-Jazarī, 'Uthmān attempted to retain of the seven *aḥruf* such variations as could be accommodated by the newly issued codices. Al-Suyūṭī accepted Ibn al-Jazarī's argument.⁸⁵⁴

Moreover, according to Ibn al-Jazarī, there are three criteria for the canonicity of a Qur'ānic reading. First, the reading must be in agreement with Arabic grammar. Second, the reading must conform to one of the 'Uthmānic codices. Third, the reading must be supported by an authentic chain of authoritative readers.⁸⁵⁵ Based on these criteria, not strictly applied, Ibn al-Jazarī argued in favour of three readings (*qirā'āt*) to

⁸⁵² Al-Qurṭubī, vol. 1, p. 35; Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, pp. 74-75.

⁸⁵³ Ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr*, vol. 1, p. 31.

⁸⁵⁴ Al-Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, vol. 1, p. 139.

⁸⁵⁵ Ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr*, vol. 1, p. 15.

be added to Ibn Mujāhid's seven.⁸⁵⁶ According to him, these ten readings altogether are multiply attested (*mutawātir*) so as to preclude doubt about their authenticity.

Ibn al-Jazarī accepted in principle that readings meeting his criteria for canonicity, even beyond the ten, would similarly qualify. Al-Suyūṭī likewise accepts that there could be other famous readings that fit Ibn al-Jazarī's criteria.⁸⁵⁷ Other readings were known to him, but he did not classify them.⁸⁵⁸ Following the work of Ibn al-Jazarī, al-Suyūṭī was now better positioned to make use of variant readings than were al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr. Not only has the number of canonical readings increased, but, more importantly, the ten readings are all considered as remnants of the seven *aḥruf*. On that view, the ten readings are all divinely revealed. Hence for al-Suyūṭī, in sharp contrast with al-Ṭabarī, these variants are not impositions to be explained away. Rather, al-Suyūṭī welcomes them as facets of the multifaceted Qur'ān.

As did the exegetes before him, al-Suyūṭī can simply label as abrogated any reading which, though reported on sound authority, does not conform to the 'Uthmānic codices. But, as we shall presently see, al-Suyūṭī has worked out a theoretical foundation for welcoming even such readings into his *tafsīr*.

⁸⁵⁶ Al-Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, vol. 1, pp. 216-17.

⁸⁵⁷ Al-Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, vol. 1, p. 217.

⁸⁵⁸ Eventually, other scholars will classify another four to be added to the ten. But these latter four would fail to achieve canonical status. For a convenient list of the fourteen readers see Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, pp. 49-50. For variations among the fourteen see al-Bannā' Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Muḥammad *Iḥāf fuḍalā' al-bashar fī al-qirā'āt al-arba'ati ashḥ* (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob, 2001).

7.1.2 The Importance of Variant Readings for Exegesis

Al-Suyūṭī's interest in variant readings is a necessary outcome of his hermeneutics. In *al-Durr* he merely mentions the traditions without explaining what he intends by their inclusion. But, from his book *al-Itqān*, we can understand al-Suyūṭī's special interest in variant readings.

In the *Itqān*, al-Suyūṭī classifies reported readings into six ranks.⁸⁵⁹ The first rank is *mutawātir*, comprising those readings which were relayed through multiple lines of transmission and are therefore indubitable. The second is *mashhūr*. These are readings which are not as well established as are the readings of the *mutawātir* rank, though they meet Ibn al-Jazarī's three criteria. The third rank is *āḥād*, comprising those readings having a few sound *isnāds*, but deviating either from the 'Uthmānic codices or the rules of Arabic. These should not be recited as a part of the Qur'ān. Fourth are the deviant (*shādhah*) readings. Their *isnāds* are not authentic. Fifth are the fabricated (*mawḍū'*) readings. In the sixth rank are the interpolations (*mudraj*) similar to what is found in the transmission of *ḥadīths*. These interpolations were inserted into the Qur'ān by way of *tafsīr*.⁸⁶⁰

Al-Suyūṭī then gives examples showing Muḥammad's companions adding such interpretive glosses to the Qur'ān.⁸⁶¹ We will return to such readings below. For the moment, it is important to appreciate the theoretical advance al-Suyūṭī has made by elucidating this sixth category of readings. Having admitted that some readings include

⁸⁵⁹ Al-Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, vol. 1, pp. 207-208.

⁸⁶⁰ Al-Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, vol. 1, p. 208.

⁸⁶¹ Al-Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, vol. 1, pp. 208-209.

the interpretative glosses of Muḥammad’s companions, al-Suyūṭī maintains that such readings deserve mention over and above later attempts at *tafsīr*.⁸⁶² With such theoretical foundations in place, al-Suyūṭī is now ready to include in his exegesis far more reports of variant readings than either al-Ṭabarī or Ibn Kathīr was willing to include.

Al-Suyūṭī takes his conclusions a step further to argue that variant readings are not peripheral to *tafsīr* but central. In the *Itqān*, al-Suyūṭī delineated the principles of tradition-based exegesis in addition to other genres of exegesis. He then introduced the proto-version of *al-Durr*, which he named *Turjumān al-Qur’an*, as a work conforming to the principles of tradition-based exegesis.⁸⁶³ After introducing that tradition-based *tafsīr*, al-Suyūṭī immediately added the following caption: ‘Caution.’ Under that head, al-Suyūṭī set out to elucidate the intimate connection that exists between variant readings and various interpretations of the Qur’ān. Al-Suyūṭī explains that the mention of variant readings is an important aspect of any tradition-based exegesis. It is thus in the heart of his discussion on hermeneutics that al-Suyūṭī writes:

It is necessary to know the *tafsīrs* which are transmitted on the authority of the Companions [of Muḥammad] in accordance with specific readings [of the Qur’ān]. The reason is that varied exegeses have been reported on the Companions’ authority; yet these exegeses are not opposed to each other, for each is based on a different reading of the Qur’ān.⁸⁶⁴

Al-Suyūṭī then presented three examples from the Qur’ān to show how variable exegeses were due to variant readings.⁸⁶⁵ As we will see from the second example, al-

⁸⁶² Al-Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, vol. 1, p. 219.

⁸⁶³ On the relationship between *Turjumān al-Qur’an* and *al-Durr*, see my Chapter 2 above.

⁸⁶⁴ Al-Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, vol. 4, p. 484.

⁸⁶⁵ Al-Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, vol. 4, p. 484-85.

Ṭabarī in his *tafsīr* was forced by the weight of traditions to acknowledge the connection between a varied interpretation and a variant reading. But in the other two examples the point was obscured in al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr*. Through his unique emphasis on variant readings, al-Suyūṭī was thus updating the *tafsīr* tradition beyond the work of al-Ṭabarī.

7.2 Variant Readings as a Source of Various Exegeses

I will now examine the three examples whereby al-Suyūṭī shows that variant readings produce variable exegeses. Modern scholarship suggests that the causation was in the other direction—that various exegetical attempts were supported by the invention of variant readings.⁸⁶⁶ Our purpose here, however, is not to determine the origins of the variant readings but to understand al-Suyūṭī's approach to variants in contradistinction with other exegetes.

Al-Suyūṭī's first example refers to Qur'ān 15:15. According to Qur'ān 15:7, Muḥammad's detractors demand miracles as proof of the scripture's divine origin. In response, Qur'ān 15:15 asserts: "Even if We opened a gateway into Heaven for them and they rose through it, higher and higher, they would still say, 'Our vision is blocked. Rather, we are bewitched.'" ⁸⁶⁷ According to al-Suyūṭī, the verb *sukkirat*, which I have translated here as 'blocked,' can also be read as *sukirat* without the doubling of the second consonant *kāf*. With the single *kāf*, the verb *sukirat* means 'enchanted.' As al-Suyūṭī indicates, this discussion is also found in al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr*. Al-Ṭabarī had

⁸⁶⁶ John Burton, *An Introduction to the Ḥadīth* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994) p. 58; Bruce Fudge, *Qur'ānic Hermeneutics: al-Ṭabrisī and the craft of commentary* (New York: Routledge, 2011) pp. 5-6.

⁸⁶⁷ Qur'ān 15:14-15.

explained that the two meanings are close to each other; hence both are acceptable.⁸⁶⁸ He attached both meanings to the single reading *sukkirat* with the doubled *kāf*, and did not accept the alternative reading *sukirat*.⁸⁶⁹ Therefore, while al-Ṭabarī accepted the two meanings of the verse, he did not accept both readings. Al-Ṭabarī's attitude to the variant reading is at first glance surprising, seeing that the variant is now generally accepted as one of the seven canonical readings.⁸⁷⁰ However, as we have seen above, in al-Ṭabarī's day the system of the seven readings was not quite settled. Thus, al-Ṭabarī did not mention the eponyms of the seven readings. Instead, al-Ṭabarī credited the reading of *sukkirat* to the people of Medina and Iraq; and the reading of *sukirat* to Mujāhid.⁸⁷¹ In his final analysis, al-Ṭabarī writes that he does not deem permissible any reading but *sukkirat*, since the overwhelming evidence points to that as the correct reading.⁸⁷²

As we have seen, however, al-Suyūṭī accepted the readings of the seven and of the additional three. Hence al-Suyūṭī had no qualms about including the variant which al-Ṭabarī discarded. Like al-Ṭabarī before him, al-Suyūṭī embraces both meanings of the verse. But, in contrast with al-Ṭabarī, al-Suyūṭī does not erect both meanings on the basis of the single reading. Rather, he explains that the acceptable dual reading is the very factor that gave rise to the two meanings.

⁸⁶⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 14, p. 19.

⁸⁶⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 14, p. 19.

⁸⁷⁰ The reading is that of Ibn Kathīr among the seven readers. See ʿĀlawī b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Balafqīh, *al-Qirāʾāt al-ʿashr al-mutawātirah min ʿarṣat al-shāṭibīyah wa-l-durrah*, ed. Muḥammad Karīm Rājīm (Medina: Dār al-Muhājir, 1994) p. 232.

⁸⁷¹ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 14, p. 17.

⁸⁷² Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 14, p. 19.

I will discuss the second example below. Al-Suyūṭī's third example similarly demonstrates, contrary to al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr*, that a dimorphous reading of Qur'ān 4:43 is at the root of two interpretations. The verse prescribes a dry ablution as a special dispensation for those men who touch women and afterwards find no water with which to purify themselves before prayer.⁸⁷³ The exegetes cannot agree on whether 'touch' in the verse refers to a simple touch, as with the hand, or whether it is a euphemism for sexual intercourse.⁸⁷⁴ However, al-Suyūṭī explains that the verb 'to touch' may be read in two ways: *lāmastum* with the long vowel; and *lamastum* without the long vowel. *Lāmastum* refers to intercourse; *lamastum* refers to touching with the hand. Hence al-Suyūṭī concludes that there is no conflict between the two exegeses: they imply two different legal judgements, but each rests on its own reading.⁸⁷⁵ For al-Suyūṭī, the two readings were an accepted reality. The ʿUthmānic consonantal ductus was written without the *alif* signifying the long 'a' vowel in the verb, which appears as follows: *lmstm*. The ductus could thus accommodate either a short or a long 'a' vowel after the first consonant. Two of the canonical seven readers applied the short vowel; the others inferred the *alif*.

Al-Ṭabarī, on the other hand, was unclear about the basis of the two meanings, and the basis of his acceptance of the two readings in question. First, he based both meanings on the single reading. Then he mentioned that there are two readings. Then he attempted to explain the two readings as having the same meaning. He writes that *lāmastum* means both a simple touch and sexual intercourse. Moreover, according to him

⁸⁷³ See also Qur'ān 5:6.

⁸⁷⁴ See al-Ṭabarī, vol. 5, pp. 122-130. Among the views presented by al-Ṭabarī is the view that if any part of a man's body touches any part of a woman's body then their state of purity stands nullified.

⁸⁷⁵ Al-Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, vol. 4, p. 484.

lāmastum implies a mutual touch.⁸⁷⁶ *Lamastum*, on the other hand, refers to a subject touching an object. Al-Ṭabarī argues, however, that even with the use of this transitive verb, the action is unavoidably mutual due to the nature of touching between persons. For, he adds, if a part of a man has touched a part of a woman then it is implied that the said part of the woman also touched the said part of the man. Hence, whereas the verb *lāmastum* with the long vowel inherently indicates mutuality, the verb *lamastum* with the short vowel also, practically, entails mutuality. Al-Ṭabarī concludes that, since the two readings have the same meaning, both are acceptable.

Hence it is clear that al-Ṭabarī lacks a consistent epistemological foundation for accepting or rejecting variant readings. Now he accepts both readings because they are similar in meaning. However, as we have seen above, he applied a contrary principle when dealing with a variant reading of Qur’ān 15:15. On that occasion he was likewise faced with two readings having, according to him, the same meaning. But on that occasion he rejected one reading simply because it was not the reading of the majority.

I turn now to al-Suyūṭī’s second example. A variant reading of Qur’ān 14:50 does violence to the ‘Uthmānic ductus. Yet al-Ṭabarī could not but yield silently to the pressure of the numerous traditions asserting that reading.⁸⁷⁷ Qur’ān 14:50 states that the garments of the deniers will be made of pitch (*qaṭirān*). Al-Ṭabarī presents two traditions showing that the word *qaṭirān* refers to the tar that was used to treat the mange of

⁸⁷⁶ His explanation here is based on the fact that this is a third-form verb; and third-form verbs can entail mutual action.

⁸⁷⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 13, pp. 203-204.

camels.⁸⁷⁸ Then he presented fifteen traditions showing that the garments will be of either brass or copper. In many of these traditions, the interpretation that the garment will be of either brass or copper is explicitly linked to a variant reading. Instead of the single word *qaṭirān* of the standard reading, the variant has two words: *qiṭr ān*.⁸⁷⁹ The single word *qṭrān* of the ʿUthmānic ductus has thus been separated into two words *qiṭr* (brass or copper) and *ān* (heated to the utmost). However, in presenting these traditions, al-Ṭabarī makes no further comment about the oddity of the reading. He lacks a theoretical foundation for a consistent treatment of non-canonical readings.

In mentioning his second example, however, al-Suyūṭī is quite clear as to his principle. He writes that both meanings have been reported: pitch and melted copper. Al-Suyūṭī and al-Ṭabarī both link the two meanings of the verse to the two readings. But whereas al-Ṭabarī did not know what to say of the variant, al-Suyūṭī uses it as evidence for a broad principle: various interpretations often rest on variant readings. Altogether, these three examples from the *Itqān* show that al-Suyūṭī had a special interest in variant readings due to their bearing on Qurʾānic exegesis.

Having seen from the *Itqān* how the appeal to variant readings is central to al-Suyūṭī's hermeneutics, we are now ready to explore specific instances in *al-Durr* where his theory can be seen in practice. I thus turn now to an examination of data drawn from *al-Durr*. There are three ways in which variant readings acquire comparatively greater prominence in *al-Durr*. First, in *al-Durr*, the traditions which mention variant readings stand on par with other traditions whereas in other *tafsīrs* variant readings are given

⁸⁷⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 13, pp. 202-203.

⁸⁷⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 13, pp. 203-204.

secondary treatment. Second, *al-Durr* often includes more variations than are mentioned in the other *tafsīrs*. Third, whereas the other exegetes attach negative comments to the variant readings, al-Suyūṭī offers no comment, either positive or negative.

To show al-Suyūṭī's comparatively greater interest in variant readings, I will present three sets of citations from the various *tafsīrs*. In the first set of examples, I will include variant readings which *al-Durr* contains in common with the *tafsīr* of al-Ṭabarī or of Ibn Kathīr or both. As we examine that set of examples, it will become evident that al-Suyūṭī was more welcoming of variants than were his predecessors. Then I will turn to examples of variant readings which *al-Durr* contains, but which are absent from the *tafsīrs* of both al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr. I place these in two categories. In the first category are those variants which were also included in the *tafsīr* of al-Shawkānī or of al-Ālūsī or both. From our examination of this category of variants, al-Suyūṭī's influence on the later *tafsīr* tradition will become evident. In the final category I include variants which are mentioned in *al-Durr* alone of the five exegetes mentioned above.

7.3 Variants Mentioned by al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr

I will now examine some of the instances in which either al-Ṭabarī or Ibn Kathīr mentions a variant that is also found in *al-Durr*. From an examination of the manner in which these variants appear in the three *tafsīrs*, it will become evident that *al-Durr* represents the variants in a far more favourable light than do the other two *tafsīrs*.

After recounting the genesis of the cosmos and of humans, the Qur'ān's second chapter turns to its view of Israelite history. In Qur'ān 2:61 the Banu Isrā'īl are still wandering in the desert, and they are not satisfied with manna and quail. They ask for *fūm*, among other produce of the earth. What then is *fūm*? Al-Ṭabarī presents fifteen

traditions to show that *fūm* means either wheat or bread or both.⁸⁸⁰ According to the fourteenth tradition, *fūm* is used for wheat in the dialect of the Banu Hāshim, Muḥammad’s clan. The fifteenth tradition presents a line of poetry to illustrate the use of *fūm* with the meaning wheat.⁸⁸¹ Then al-Ṭabarī turned to another possible meaning of *fūm* as garlic (*thūm*). In support of this meaning, al-Ṭabarī presents two traditions simply equating the two words *fūm* and *thūm*.⁸⁸² In his final analysis, he mentions that in one reading the word *thūm* occurs in the place of *fūm*. He writes: “It has been mentioned that in the ancient language, (*al-lughah al-qadīmah*) wheat and bread together are called *fūm*.”⁸⁸³ He then gives a verb *fawwim* which, he says, means ‘bake’ in the ancient language, being the imperative derived from *fūm*. Hence *fūm* is a principal baking ingredient. Then he adds: “It is mentioned that Abdullah b. Mas‘ūd read *wa thūmihā* (and its garlic).” Al-Ṭabarī then explains that, if the report is authentic, then the reading is such because the letters *thā’* and *fā’* are similar in their pronunciation. Due to the proximity of pronunciation of the two letters, they have been interchanged in many Arabic words and expressions, some examples of which al-Ṭabarī presents.⁸⁸⁴ In sum, al-Ṭabarī has maintained a disinterested distance from the report of Ibn Mas‘ūd’s reading by introducing it with the words, “It has been mentioned,” and following up with the

⁸⁸⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 1, pp. 357-58.

⁸⁸¹ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 1, pp. 358.

⁸⁸² Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 1, pp. 359.

⁸⁸³ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 1, pp. 359.

⁸⁸⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 1, pp. 359.

condition, “If this is authentic.” His overwhelming support, however, is for the canonical *fūm* and its associated meaning ‘wheat or bread.’

On the meaning of *fūm*, Ibn Kathīr basically summarizes the *tafsīr* of al-Ṭabarī and adds notes from the *tafsīrs* of Ibn Abī Ḥātim and al-Qurṭubī.⁸⁸⁵ Ibn Kathīr’s position is similar to that of al-Ṭabarī. His overwhelming support is for the reading *fūm* and its related meaning ‘wheat.’ After mentioning *thūm* as the reading of Ibn Mas‘ūd, Ibn Kathīr adds that Mujāhid and Ibn ‘Abbās also interpreted the verse as referring to *thūm*. But Ibn Kathīr’s evaluation of the non-canonical *thūm* is simply copied from al-Ṭabarī. Hence Ibn Kathīr also predicates his discussion of the variant on the explicit condition: “If this is authentic.”⁸⁸⁶ Ibn Kathīr thus remains non-committal with respect to the variant.

Al-Suyūṭī’s extraordinary interest in the non-canonical variant is evident in his presentation of traditions reporting the various readings. He presents four traditions in favour of the meaning of *fūm* as wheat; four traditions in favour of the meaning garlic; and one tradition mentioning both meanings. Hence he has presented the same number of traditions in favour of each meaning. But the nature of the traditions in favour of garlic shifts the balance in favour of the variant reading. Four of al-Suyūṭī’s traditions which mention garlic as the intended meaning do so on the basis of the variant reading. The tradition mentioning Ibn Mas‘ūd’s reading is cited from Ibn Abī Dāwūd’s reputable book on codices, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*.⁸⁸⁷ From the same book al-Suyūṭī cites a tradition which includes Ibn ‘Abbās’ reading of that variant. According to the same tradition, Ibn ‘Abbās

⁸⁸⁵ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, pp. 279-80.

⁸⁸⁶ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, pp. 280.

⁸⁸⁷ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 1, pp. 385-6.

explains his stance with regards to variant readings in general, and this one in particular. Ibn ‘Abbās explains, “My recitation is [generally] that of Zayd. But in more than ten instances I follow the mode (*ḥarf*) of Ibn Mas‘ūd. This is one of those instances.”⁸⁸⁸ Al-Suyūṭī has thus added an important early authority, Ibn ‘Abbās, as a reader of the variant. Al-Suyūṭī has thus shown a greater interest in the variant reading than did al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr.

Al-Suyūṭī’s influence on the subsequent *tafsīr* tradition will be seen in the way in which al-Shawkānī and al-Ālūsī deal with the variant reading. On the whole, al-Shawkānī represents the two views fairly evenly. But, following al-Suyūṭī, al-Shawkānī mentions *thūm* as the reading not only of Ibn Mas‘ūd but also of Ibn ‘Abbās.⁸⁸⁹ Al-Shawkānī thus cites the tradition in which Ibn ‘Abbās says that, though he generally follows Zayd’s reading, he reads *thūm* as did Ibn Mas‘ūd.⁸⁹⁰

Al-Ālūsī mentions the meaning of *fūm* as wheat. He writes that there is no disagreement among linguists that *fūm* refers to any grain used in baking. But, following al-Ṭabarī, al-Ālūsī adds that *fūm* was originally *thūm*, the change resulting from the transposition of the initial letter. Finally, al-Ālūsī’s preference is for the view that *fūm* means garlic.⁸⁹¹ However, al-Ālūsī stops short of citing the variant reading. In this case, al-Suyūṭī’s exegesis of Qur’ān 2:61 has had an influence on al-Shawkānī, but not on al-Ālūsī.

⁸⁸⁸ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 1, p. 386.

⁸⁸⁹ Al-Shawkānī, p. 102.

⁸⁹⁰ Al-Shawkānī, p. 102.

⁸⁹¹ Al-Ālūsī, *Rūh al-ma‘ānī: tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘aẓīm wa-l-sab‘ al-mathānī* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.) vol. 1, p. 434. References to this work are to this very edition except where noted.

To take another example, Qur’ān 2:126 appears in Abdel Haleem’s translation as follows:

Abraham said, “My Lord, make this land secure and provide with produce those of its people who believe in God and the Last Day.” God said, “As for those who disbelieve, I will grant them enjoyment for a short while and then subject them to the torment of the Fire—an evil destination.”⁸⁹²

That appears as a dialogue between Abraham and God. Abraham prays for the believers alone, but God answers that he will grant the provisions of this world to the disbelievers as well. Al-Ṭabarī embraced this interpretation, and the canonical reading on which it is based, attributing both the reading and the interpretation to Ubayy. However, whereas the verse in Arabic identifies its first speaker, Abraham, by name, it does not specify the subject of the second occurrence of the verb *qāl* (he said). Following the common interpretation, Abdel Haleem in his translation has identified the second speaker as God. But could it be that Abraham uttered both statements, especially seeing that the second statement begins with the conjunction *wa* (and)? If so, then Abraham prayed for both believers and non-believers to enjoy the provisions of this life, as follows:

Abraham said, “My Lord, make this land secure and provide with produce those of its people who believe in God and the Last Day and those who disbelieve. Grant them enjoyment for a short while and then subject them to the torment of the Fire—an evil destination.

Al-Ṭabarī had to address this possible rendering, for so the verse appears in a non-canonical reading.⁸⁹³ The verbs appearing in the first person imperfect indicative in the standard reading are read as imperatives in the variant reading. Instead of, “I will grant them enjoyment (*umatti’uhu*), the non-canonical reading has, “Grant them enjoyment

⁸⁹² Qur’ān 2:126; Abdel Haleem, p. 15.

⁸⁹³ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 1, p. 629.

(*amti 'hu*).”⁸⁹⁴ And, instead of, “I will subject them (*aḍṭarruhu*),” the non-canonical reading has, “Subject them (*iḍṭarrahu*).” The exegesis of Ibn ‘Abbās, which al-Ṭabarī reports, could only have been based on this non-canonical reading. Yet al-Ṭabarī attributes the non-canonical reading not to Ibn ‘Abbās but to Mujāhid. Moreover, al-Ṭabarī finally disregards the interpretation of Ibn ‘Abbās and castigates the reading of Mujāhid as being *shādhah* (irregular).⁸⁹⁵

Ibn Kathīr repeats the discussion from al-Ṭabarī’s *tafsīr*, expanding it by linking the ideas to other Qur’ānic verses and *ḥadīths*.⁸⁹⁶ Thus he mentions the view of Ibn ‘Abbās and the associated variant of Mujāhid. In the course of his exegesis of the verse, however, Ibn Kathīr depicts Ibn ‘Abbās as also holding to the common interpretation which is based on the canonical reading.⁸⁹⁷ Yet Ibn Kathīr does nothing to reconcile the conflicting reports he provides about the view of Ibn ‘Abbās. Ibn Kathīr concludes the discussion along the lines traced out by al-Ṭabarī. Ibn Kathīr thus dismisses the variant reading, saying, “It is a reading opposed to the reading of the seven.” Moreover, Ibn Kathīr argues that the reading of the majority (*al-jumhūr*) makes better sense. He adds that if Abraham’s speech were continuous, there would be no need to interrupt it with the expression, “He said.” Ibn Kathīr argues that the injection of that verb is justified on the

⁸⁹⁴ Although the translation has the object pronoun here in the plural, the Arabic has it in the singular. This is because the Arabic implies the relative pronoun *man* (whoever) which is grammatically singular in Arabic but is best translated in plural constructions in English.

⁸⁹⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 1, p. 630.

⁸⁹⁶ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, pp. 399-400.

⁸⁹⁷ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 400.

canonical reading, for in that case it indicates a change of speaker from Abraham to God.⁸⁹⁸

The *tafsīrs* of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr left an unanswered question. How could Ibn ‘Abbās have held to the uncommon interpretation without also subscribing to the non-canonical reading? For, the interpretation is dependent on the reading. Yet both al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr credited the reading only to Ibn ‘Abbās’ student Mujāhid. Given that sequence of events, the exegesis of the master is based on the reading of his student. Interestingly, al-Suyūṭī does not mention the view that Mujāhid read the non-canonical version of the verse. Instead, one of al-Suyūṭī’s traditions asserts that Mujāhid read the canonical reading.⁸⁹⁹ More importantly, however, al-Suyūṭī solves the logical problem. After mentioning Ibn ‘Abbās’ exegesis of the verse, al-Suyūṭī writes: “I say: Ibn ‘Abbās used to read, *‘fa-amti ‘hu* (grant him enjoyment),’ using the verb in its command form; and that is why Ibn ‘Abbās said that the entire speech was that of Abraham.”⁹⁰⁰ This is a rare instance in *al-Durr* when al-Suyūṭī explicitly interjects his own thoughts. He generally says whatever he can by way of traditions, and holds his other thoughts to himself. But on this occasion he felt compelled to correct the logical flaw he noticed in the previous *tafsīrs*. Al-Suyūṭī thus inferred from Ibn ‘Abbās’ interpretation that Ibn ‘Abbās subscribed to the variant reading. If al-Suyūṭī could have found a *ḥadīth* to state this fact he would have presented it. Failing that, al-Suyūṭī made bold to declare, in his

⁸⁹⁸ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 400.

⁸⁹⁹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 1, pp. 652-53.

⁹⁰⁰ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 1, p. 653.

own words, that Ibn ‘Abbās’ uncommon exegesis of the verse implies his non-canonical reading of the verse.

Al-Shawkānī gave a balanced explanation of the two exegeses of the verse, and the appropriate grammatical explanation of the variant reading.⁹⁰¹ He copies all the traditions of *al-Durr*, but not al-Suyūṭī’s statement that Ibn ‘Abbās read the variant. Thus al-Shawkānī copied the tradition asserting that Mujāhid read the canonical reading, and the tradition asserting that Ibn ‘Abbās held to the uncommon exegesis.⁹⁰² But al-Shawkānī does not address the question of who read the non-canonical variant on which Ibn ‘Abbās’ exegesis is based. Al-Shawkānī prefers the view based on the common reading: only the first part of the verse was uttered by Abraham. That, al-Shawkānī declares, is the plain reading of the verse.⁹⁰³ At the same time, however, he does nothing to disparage the non-canonical reading.

After explicating the relevant part of the verse on the basis of the canonical reading, al-Ālūsī credits the non-canonical variant to both Ibn ‘Abbās and Mujāhid.⁹⁰⁴ But rather than dismiss the variant, he shows it to stand on good grammatical and contextual grounds. It is reasonable to conclude that al-Suyūṭī’s welcoming of the variant reading of Qur’ān 2:126 had a positive effect on al-Ālūsī.

Another example will further illustrate the various approaches of the exegetes to variant readings. Speaking of the Meccan hillocks al-Şafā and al-Marwah, Qur’ān 2:158

⁹⁰¹ Al-Shawkānī, p. 137.

⁹⁰² Al-Shawkānī, p. 138.

⁹⁰³ Al-Shawkānī, p. 137.

⁹⁰⁴ Al-Ālūsī, vol. 1, pp. 601-602.

declares that these are among the sacred monuments of God; hence there is no offence if anyone circumambulates them in the course of performing the *ḥajj* or *'umrah* to the *ka'bah*. The verse continues to say that God will reward those who voluntarily perform virtuous deeds. The verse reads as follows in Abdel Haleem's translation:

Safa and Marwa are among the rites of God, so for those who make major or minor pilgrimage to the House it is no offence to circulate between the two. Anyone who does good of his own accord will be rewarded, for God rewards good deeds, and knows everything.⁹⁰⁵

At first glance, the verse seems to regard the circumambulation of the hillocks as optional: there is no harm in doing it; and one who does it voluntarily will be rewarded. Some early exegetes took that view. But one only has to open a classical commentary to discover that the said view was vigorously contested. Some early commentators held the view that the circuits were essential, and that their non-performance would therefore necessitate a corrective sacrificial offering.⁹⁰⁶ Al-Ṭabarī adopted an even stricter view that the effort (*sa'ī*) between al-Ṣafā and al-Marwah were obligatory (*farḍ wājib*).⁹⁰⁷ According to him, one who omits the circuits, whether intentionally or unintentionally, must return to the sacred site and complete the rounds.⁹⁰⁸ To al-Ṭabarī, the basis of this strict ruling is the demonstrated practice of Muḥammad which must be followed. He argues that the verse is not giving new permission to practice the walk between the two

⁹⁰⁵ Qur'ān 2:158; Abdel Haleem, p. 18.

⁹⁰⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 2, p. 66-61.

⁹⁰⁷ The Quran uses the term *ṭawāf* (circumambulation) for both the movements around the *ka'bah* and the movements in relation to al-Ṣafā and al-Marwah. On the other hand, the jurisprudential literature commonly refers to the *ṭawāf* (circumambulation) as being specifically that of the *ka'bah*, and the *sa'ī* (effort) as the strides back and forth between the two hillocks.

⁹⁰⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 2, p. 62.

hillocks, since that practice, once established, was never prohibited.⁹⁰⁹ The verse merely intended to allay the irrational fears of those who hesitated to perform the *sa'ī* (the effort) between al-Ṣafā and al-Marwah. Some were hesitant because, during the days of ignorance, they used to visit those hillocks to worship their idols which were placed there.⁹¹⁰ Others, the Banu Tihāmah in particular, used to have some unspecified fear of the hillocks.⁹¹¹ The verse assures them that there is no harm in following the ongoing prophetic practice. Al-Ṭabarī supports these assertions with numerous traditions.

Five of al-Ṭabarī's traditions are of particular relevance to the question of variant readings. Three are variations of each other. According to these three, ʿĀ'ishah is approached by her nephew ʿUrwah b. al-Zubayr. He suggests to her that the verse implies the voluntary status of the *sa'ī*. She denies such an implication. She maintains that the implication would have been valid if the verse had said, "It is no offence to not circulate between the two."⁹¹² But, as it is, the verse reads without the negation, "It is no offence to circulate between the two." One cannot but admire the logical precision employed here. Given that the practice is established on some other ground, the *sunnah* of the prophet, ʿĀ'ishah would not rescind the practice on the basis of a statement that the practice is not harmful. What she demands is a statement saying that omitting the practice is not harmful. She seems unaware that the very wording she was demanding is supplied in a variant reading credited to Ibn Masʿūd and Ibn ʿAbbās, as is mentioned in al-Ṭabarī's

⁹⁰⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 2, p. 60.

⁹¹⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 2, pp. 56-58.

⁹¹¹ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 2, pp. 58-60.

⁹¹² Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 2, pp. 59, 62.

other two traditions.⁹¹³ But since al-Ṭabarī was aware of the variant reading, how would he retain his position that the *sa ʿī* is obligatory? He dismisses the variant because, “That is opposed to what is in the codices of the Muslims, and it is not permissible for anyone to add anything to the codices.”⁹¹⁴ He adds that ‘Ā’ishah, in the *ḥadīth* which we saw above, rejects the variant reading and denies that the verse was revealed that way.⁹¹⁵ That of course is al-Ṭabarī’s inference, for, as we have seen, ‘Ā’ishah in the *ḥadīth* in question does not show any awareness of the variant.

Al-Ṭabarī takes another surprising step in his insistence on the *sa ʿī*. He now addresses the hypothetical case that the variant reading is acceptable. Even then, al-Ṭabarī argues, the obligation to perform the *sa ʿī* would not be relaxed. Why? Because in that case al-Ṭabarī would argue that *lā* in *lā junāḥ* (no sin) could be superfluous. Normally *lā* serves as a negation; but in this case it would carry no meaning. Al-Ṭabarī supports his argument by referring to other Qur’ānic statements in which *lā* is similarly superfluous.⁹¹⁶

Al-Ṭabarī now combines his various arguments. First, Muḥammad has taught his followers to practice the strides between the hillocks. Second, even if the variant reading was present in the codex, its negative particle is possibly superfluous; hence the variant would not prove the voluntary status of the *sa ʿī*. Finally, al-Ṭabarī suggests that the variant cannot be used as proof since it is contrary to the ‘Uthmānic ductus, and reciting

⁹¹³ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 2, p. 61.

⁹¹⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 2, p. 62.

⁹¹⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 2, p. 62.

⁹¹⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 2, p. 63

such variants would merit punishment for adding something to the book of God.⁹¹⁷ On this single occasion al-Ṭabarī has thus revealed both his skill in dissolving undesirable evidence and his sternness in refusing undesirable readings of the Qur’ān.

Ibn Kathīr has done much to fortify the view that the performance of the *sa’ī* is a pillar (*rukṅ*) of the *ḥajj*.⁹¹⁸ The non-performance of a pillar would not be compensated for by a sacrificial offering. This is the same position as that of al-Ṭabarī, though al-Ṭabarī did not employ the same terminology. Ibn Kathīr’s intention is to align himself here with al-Shāfi‘ī, the eponym of his legal school.⁹¹⁹ Ibn Kathīr cites evidence from the *ḥadīth* books, especially those of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, to show that Muḥammad not only performed the *sa’ī* but also declared God’s command that it be done.⁹²⁰ We have seen in al-Ṭabarī’s *tafsīr* the *ḥadīth* in which ‘Ā’ishah confounds her nephew. Her nephew failed to supply the variant reading in support of his inference that the *sa’ī* is voluntary. Ibn Kathīr likewise mentions the *ḥadīth* of ‘Ā’ishah. But, unlike al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr does not mention any of the reports of the variant reading.

The range of opinions we have come across in the *tafsīrs* of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr are present also in *al-Durr*. What is unique here, however, is al-Suyūṭī’s emphasis on the variant reading. We have seen that al-Ṭabarī credited the variant reading to Ibn Mas‘ūd and Ibn ‘Abbās. Al-Suyūṭī attributes the variant not only to these two readers, but

⁹¹⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 2, p. 63.

⁹¹⁸ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 438.

⁹¹⁹ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 438.

⁹²⁰ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, pp. 437-39.

also to Ubayy and Mujāhid.⁹²¹ The association of the variant with Mujāhid is especially interesting, for it was the standard reading that al-Ṭabarī had associated with him.⁹²² Al-Suyūṭī’s unique interest in variant readings is also evident from the sources he cites here. Among his sources are Abū ‘Ubayd (d. 223/837), Ibn Abī Dāwūd (d. 316/929), and Ibn al-Anbārī (d. 328/939), all writers on the early codification of the Qur’ān.⁹²³ Finally, al-Suyūṭī’s remarkable interest in this reading is evident from the number of readers he associates with it. Whereas al-Ṭabarī mentioned two readers; and Ibn Kathīr mentioned none; al-Suyūṭī mentioned four.

Al-Shawkānī did not mention the variant reading. When he wanted to find some support for the view that the *sa ṭ* is voluntary, he pointed to the final expression of the verse which indicates that God will reward anyone who voluntarily does a good deed.⁹²⁴ On the other hand, he mentions a number of *ḥadīths* which, in the earlier *tafsīrs*, support the view that the *sa ṭ* is necessary.

Al-Ālūsī does his best to support the opinion of Abū Ḥanīfah whom he refers to as his *imām*. Al-Ālūsī writes that, according to Abū Ḥanīfah, the *sa ṭ* is *wājib* (essential) such that its omission would be corrected by a compensatory sacrifice.⁹²⁵ The ingenuity of the interpreters in arguing for their partisan legal rulings is particularly striking in al-

⁹²¹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 2, p. 92.

⁹²² Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 2, p. 61.

⁹²³ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 2, p. 92. The work of Abī ‘Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām is *Faḍā’il al-Qur’ān*, ed. Marwān al-‘Aṭīyah et al (Damascus: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1995). The work of Ibn Abī Dāwūd is *Kitāb al-Maṣāḥif*, ed. Muḥibb al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Subḥān Wā’iz (Doha: Wizārat al-Awqāf, 1995). The work of Ibn al-Anbārī is most likely the now lost “Kitāb al-maṣāḥif.” See Arthur Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur’ān: The Old Codices* (Leiden: Brill, 1937) p. 11.

⁹²⁴ Al-Shawkānī, p. 151.

⁹²⁵ Al-Ālūsī, (2003) vol. 2, p. 527.

Ālūsī's *tafsīr* at this point. He argues that Qur'ān 2:158 did not mean to cancel the known obligation. He illustrates the point with an example. Suppose someone missed the afternoon prayer and now asks if he may offer the missed prayer just before sunset, a time when unnecessary prayers are to be avoided. "There is no harm if you do," would be a fitting reply. That reply is not intended to cancel the known obligation to offer the prayer.⁹²⁶

With such an acute interest in defending the rulings of his legal school, al-Ālūsī cannot but dismiss the variant reading. He mentions the reading as that of Ibn Mas'ūd and Ubayy, thus being content to mention only the two foremost authorities associated with the variant in *al-Durr*. Al-Ālūsī then writes: "It is not appropriate to use this reading in support of the view that the *sa'ī* is voluntary, since the reading is *shādhah* (deviant)." He now continues along the lines laid out by al-Ṭabarī. The variant reading has no weight, he writes, since it is opposed to the standard reading. It is possible, he adds, that in the context of the verse the negative particle included in the variant reading is superfluous.⁹²⁷ Thus, for both al-Ṭabarī and al-Ālūsī the statement, "There is no offense if he does not circumambulate them," can mean, if necessary, the same as the statement, "There is no offense if he circumambulates them."

In sum, neither Ibn Kathīr nor al-Shawkānī mentioned the variant of Quran 2:158 indicating the voluntary nature of the *sa'ī*. Both al-Ṭabarī and al-Ālūsī mentioned two readers of the variant, but dismissed the variant as being opposed to the canonical reading. Al-Suyūṭī, on the other hand, mentioned four readers of the variant and said

⁹²⁶ Al-Ālūsī, (2003) vol. 2, p. 527.

⁹²⁷ Al-Ālūsī, (2003) vol. 2, p. 527.

nothing to disparage it. Thus it is clear that al-Suyūṭī was far more interested in that variant reading than were al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr. In the case of that variant, however, al-Suyūṭī has had no success in influencing either al-Shawkānī or al-Ālūsī to mention it in a favourable light.

7.4 Variants Not Mentioned by al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr

I will now survey some of the variants which al-Suyūṭī included but which both al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr failed to mention. I further subdivide this set of variants under two subheads. Under the present subhead I include those variants which also appear either in the *tafsīr* of al-Shawkānī or of al-Ālūsī or both. I thus reserve for my next subhead those variants which were included in *al-Durr*, but not in the *tafsīrs* of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, al-Shawkānī and al-Ālūsī.

The latter half of the Qur’ān’s first *sūrah* is a supplication. By reciting this *surah*, suppliants ask God to guide them with regards to the straight path. Qur’ān 1:7 specifies the desired path as being the path of those people whom God has favoured. The relative pronoun corresponding to “those people” is *alladhīna* in the canonical readings. But al-Suyūṭī mentions the reading of ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb and Abdullāh b. al-Zubayr as containing instead the relative pronoun *man* (whoever).⁹²⁸ Al-Shawkānī reproduced this information from *al-Durr*.⁹²⁹ Al-Ālūsī mentions this variant as the reading of ‘Umar, Ibn

⁹²⁸ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 1, p. 81-82.

⁹²⁹ Al-Shawkānī, p. 48.

Mas'ūd, Zayd b. 'Alī and the *ahl al-bayt*.⁹³⁰ On this rare occasion, al-Ālūsī has surpassed al-Suyūfī in shoring up a variant reading with reference to multiple authorities.

The standard reading of Qur'ān 2:102 implies that magic was divinely revealed to the two angels of Babel who then taught people magic. In the canonical readings the word for two angels is *malakayn*. With the change of the middle vowel, however, the word becomes *malikayn* (two kings). The kingdom of Solomon was mentioned early in the same verse. Commentators thus linked the events to Solomon's kingdom, and encompassed in their exegeses legends about him and his father David. Al-Suyūfī gives a variant reading which not only mentions two kings, but also names them as David and Solomon.⁹³¹ The implication of this reading is that magic was revealed to David and Solomon. Al-Shawkānī also mentions this variant.⁹³²

Qur'ān 2:236 declares that it is not sinful for a man to divorce his wife prior to having touched her. But, as can be seen from al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr*, some interpreters took the word touch (*mass*) here as a euphemism for intercourse (*jimā'*).⁹³³ Supporting this interpretation is a reading of Ibn Mas'ūd. The reading appears in al-Suyūfī, al-Shawkānī and al-Ālūsī.⁹³⁴ Al-Shawkānī said that he obtained the report from al-Ṭabarī. However, the edition of al-Ṭabarī which I consulted failed to show the variant, and it seems that al-Shawkānī actually obtained the information from al-Suyūfī.

⁹³⁰ Al-Ālūsī, vol. 1, p. 156.

⁹³¹ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 1, p. 504; al-Ṭabarī mentions a variant that reads *malikayn* (two kings), but not the variant which names the two kings. See al-Ṭabarī vol. 1, p. 528.

⁹³² Al-Shawkānī, p. 123.

⁹³³ See al-Ṭabarī, vol. 2, pp. 233-34.

⁹³⁴ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, p. 27; al-Shawkānī, p. 219; al-Ālūsī, vol. 2, p. 230.

A segment of Qur’ān 3:7 has proved especially problematic for exegetes. Depending on where a reader determines the separation between two statements, the verse could be construed in two different ways. Referring to the Qur’ān more generally, the verse could be saying, “No one knows its interpretation except God. And those who are well grounded in knowledge say, ‘We believe in it.’” Such is the canonical reading. On the other hand, the verse could be saying, “No one knows its interpretation except God and those who are well grounded in knowledge. They say, ‘We believe in it.’” On the canonical reading God alone knows the Qur’ān’s interpretation. On the non-canonical reading those who are well grounded in knowledge also know the Qur’ān’s interpretation. The non-canonical reading is mentioned across the various *tafsīrs*. There is a variant, however, which is mentioned by al-Suyūṭī but not by al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr. That variant does not address the issue of where to separate the two statements. It merely expands and paraphrases the first part of the statement, “And no one knows its interpretation except God.” The variant, reported by al-Suyūṭī, reads: “And the reality of its interpretation is with none but God.”⁹³⁵ Al-Shawkānī copied this variant from al-Suyūṭī.⁹³⁶ But al-Ālūsī is in alignment here with al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr who have a similar variant but one that lacks the word ‘reality (*ḥaqīqah*).’⁹³⁷ The variant in al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Ālūsī thus reads, “And their interpretation is with none but God.”⁹³⁸ Hence only al-Suyūṭī and al-Shawkānī mentioned the more extensive variant.

⁹³⁵ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, p. 458.

⁹³⁶ Al-Shawkānī, p. 270.

⁹³⁷ Al-Ālūsī, vol. 3, p. 137.

⁹³⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 3, p. 216; Ibn Kathīr, vol. 2, p. 683.

Qur’ān 5:62 censures those among the People of the Book who compete with each other in sin (*al-ithm*), hostility (*al-’udwān*) and the consumption of that which is unlawful (*akl al-suht*). The following verse, Qur’ān 5:63, then asks, “Why do the rabbis and the priests not prevent them from their evil speech (*qawlim al-ithm*) and their consumption of that which is unlawful?” Thus of the three transgressions mentioned in Qur’ān 5:62, only two are mentioned in Qur’ān 5:63. Absent is the second of the three transgressions: hostility (*al-’udwān*). Moreover, whereas the first transgression in 5:62 was sin (*al-ithm*), the comparable transgression in Qur’ān 5:63 is “their sinful speech (*qawlim al-ithm*).” However, al-Suyūṭī mentions Ibn ‘Abbās’ reading of Qur’ān 5:63 in which the first transgression becomes “their speech of enmity (*qawlihim al-’udwān*).”⁹³⁹ The variant thus involves a recombination of existing terms. Al-Ālūsī also mentions this variant.⁹⁴⁰

In Qur’ān 5:101 God warns the Muslims in Muḥammad’s presence not to ask about things which God has mercifully held back from mentioning. If Muslims were to ask about such things while the Qur’ān is being revealed the answers will be given, but such answers would cause the Muslims distress. The following verse, Qur’ān 5:102, adds that some people did ask about such things, “but then disbelieved in them.” That seems to imply that the people disbelieved in the things they asked about. What is more to the point is that they disbelieved in the answers they were given. But the fact that they were given answers is not explicitly mentioned in the verse. The missing statement was, however, supplied in the reading of Ubayy which includes the words *buyyinat lahum* (it

⁹³⁹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 5, p. 373.

⁹⁴⁰ Al-Ālūsī, vol. 4, p. 263.

was made clear to them). On that reading, reported by al-Suyūṭī, the people disbelieved in the answers.⁹⁴¹ Al-Ālūsī also mentioned this variant.⁹⁴²

Qur’ān commentaries generally link the story of the Satanic verses to Qur’ān 22:52 in which God assures Muḥammad: “Even prior to you, whenever we sent messengers or prophets Satan casts something into their hopes. But God removes what Satan throws in. Moreover, God makes his signs clear.” The verse mentions two categories of recipients of divine revelation: messengers and prophets. But a *ḥadīth* in *al-Durr* contains Ibn ‘Abbās’ variant reading which mentions a third category: *muḥaddath* (an inspired person).⁹⁴³ In another *ḥadīth* in *al-Durr*, Abd al-Raḥman b. ‘Awf, a companion of Muḥammad, explains that whereas the verse once contained the three categories, the third, *muḥaddath*, was subsequently abrogated. That same *ḥadīth*, however, gives four examples of such inspired persons: the unnamed preacher mentioned in Qur’ān 36:20; Luqmān; the believer belonging to the family of the Pharaoh (Qur’ān 40:28); and the companion of Moses.⁹⁴⁴ Al-Shawkānī copied these two *ḥadīths* from *al-Durr*.⁹⁴⁵

Qur’ān 22:78 says: “Strive for God in all earnestness.” But, al-Suyūṭī mentions the following variant: “Strive for God in all earnestness in the later days as they strove

⁹⁴¹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 5, p. 546.

⁹⁴² Al-Ālūsī, vol. 5, p. 60.

⁹⁴³ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 10, p. 524.

⁹⁴⁴ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 10, p. 524.

⁹⁴⁵ Al-Shawkānī, p. 1174. Cf. al-Ṭabarī, vol. 17, pp. 219-224.

against you in the early days.” In a *ḥadīth*, ‘Umar asks, “Were we not used to reciting [the variant]?”⁹⁴⁶ The tradition appears also in al-Shawkānī.⁹⁴⁷

The Qur’ān’s 49th *sūrah* teaches many aspects of social behaviour. Stressing utmost respect for Muḥammad in particular, the second verse of that *sūrah* prohibits Muslims from calling out loudly to Muḥammad in the manner in which they would call out to each other. In this vein, Qur’ān 49:4-5 shows what would constitute unacceptable behaviour: “As for those who call out to you from behind the apartments, most of them have no sense. If they had remained patient until you came out to them that would have been better for them.” The exegetes identified the perpetrators of such impertinent behaviour as a group visiting from the Banū Tamīm. Thus al-Suyūṭī reproduces a reading which names the tribe of the uncouth visitors.⁹⁴⁸ The tradition which al-Suyūṭī presents does not credit the reading to any particular reader, but characterizes it as being an early recitation (*al-qirā’ah al-ūlā*). Al-Ālūsī also mentioned this reading.⁹⁴⁹

Qur’ān 54:1-2 read: “The hour has approached, and the moon was split. And if they see a sign they turn away saying, ‘A continuous magic.’” The exegetes had to decide if the splitting of the moon mentioned in the verse is a past or future event. On the one hand, mention of Muḥammad’s detractors turning away in the face of a miracle, which they characterise as magic, suggests a past event. Moreover, the statement is in the perfect tense. On the other hand, according to the exegetes, the perfect tense could be

⁹⁴⁶ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 10, pp. 544-45.

⁹⁴⁷ Al-Shawkānī, p. 1180.

⁹⁴⁸ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 13, p. 543.

⁹⁴⁹ Al-Ālūsī, vol. 14, p. 212.

used to emphasize the reality of a future event. Moreover, mention of the approach of the hour, a common Qur'ānic reference to the hour of Judgement, suggests that the event is apocalyptic. A variant reading now weighs in favour of the event being past. A tradition in *al-Durr* attributes to Ḥudhayfah the following reading: *iqtarabat al-sā'atu wa qad inshaqq al-qamar* (the hour has approached after the moon was split).⁹⁵⁰ The tense has thus been changed to the pluperfect. Al-Shawkānī and al-Ālūsī both copied this tradition.⁹⁵¹

One of the troubling issues for Muslims in the second century was the question of how to define a believer. Some of the Khārijites held that those who committed grave sins such as adultery and theft ceased being believers.⁹⁵² On the other hand, Murji'ites deferred the matter of the grave sinner to God's judgement which will be rendered on the Day of Judgement and only then become known to everyone. Qur'ān 55:46 says, "Anyone who fears standing before God will have two gardens." In the light of that verse, what is to be said of the grave sinner? The question is answered in a *ḥadīth* in *al-Durr* containing the following variant reading: "Anyone who fears standing before God will have two gardens, regardless of having committed adultery and theft."⁹⁵³ According to that *ḥadīth*, someone challenged the reader of the variant, "Surely the verse does not include, 'regardless of having committed adultery and theft.'" But the reader insisted,

⁹⁵⁰ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 14, p. 70.

⁹⁵¹ Shawī, p. 1703; al-Ālūsī, vol. 15, p. 117.

⁹⁵² A.J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical Development* (New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, 1979) pp. 38-45.

⁹⁵³ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 14, p. 136.

“This is how I heard the prophet recite it, and this is how I will recite it until I die.” The *ḥadīth*, including the variant, appears also in al-Ālūsī.⁹⁵⁴

Qur’ān 66:4 scolds two of Muḥammad’s wives for having divulged Muḥammad’s secret. If they continue to defy him, the verse warns, they should know that God is Muḥammad’s patron (*mawlā*) and so too is Gabriel and the righteous ones among the believers. The Qur’ān’s exegetes, always eager to identify vague references, needed to specify who among the believers were referred to as the righteous ones in that verse. Naturally, for Sunnīs, Abū Bakr and ‘Umar are two of the most righteous. In *al-Durr*, a reading attributed to Ubayy includes the names of those two caliphs.⁹⁵⁵ Al-Ālūsī also mentions the reading.⁹⁵⁶

In Qur’ān 108:1, God address Muḥammad, “We have given you the abundance.” The verse contains a common Arabic word *a ‘ṭaynāka* which translates as, ‘we have given you.’ Al-Suyūṭī mentions a variant attributed to Umm Salmah, wife of Muḥammad. In this variant the equivalent word is *anṭaynāka*.⁹⁵⁷ Al-Shawkānī and al-Ālūsī both mention this reading. They justify it as being in conformity with an Arabic dialect but meaning the same as the canonical reading *a ‘ṭaynāka*.⁹⁵⁸

Some of these readings are uninteresting in and of themselves. However, the fact that al-Suyūṭī included these readings after they were omitted from both the *tafsīrs* of al-

⁹⁵⁴ Al-Ālūsī, vol. 15, pp. 178-79.

⁹⁵⁵ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 14, p. 586.

⁹⁵⁶ Al-Ālūsī, vol. 15, p. 228.

⁹⁵⁷ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 15, p. 697.

⁹⁵⁸ Al-Shawkānī, p. 1980; al-Ālūsī, vol. 16, p. 440.

Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr shows al-Suyūṭī’s superlative interest in variant readings.

Moreover, the fact that some of these variants subsequently made their way into the *tafsīr* of al-Shawkānī, or of al-Ālūsī, or both, is a proof of al-Suyūṭī’s lasting influence on the *tafsīr* tradition.

7.5 Variants Mentioned by al-Suyūṭī Alone

I will now indicate some instances in which al-Suyūṭī cites a variant reading that is mentioned neither by al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr before him nor by al-Shawkānī and al-Ālūsī after him. In such instances, al-Suyūṭī’s unique interest in variant readings is most readily obvious. In my notes, I will also indicate the comparable locations in the other four exegeses where the absence of the variants is evident.

As we saw above, a variant reading of Qur’ān 2:102 turned the two angels of Babel into the two kings David and Solomon. Another variant reading of the same verse attempts to avoid the implication that angels received their knowledge of magic through divine revelation. According to the standard reading, “And they followed what the devils fabricated (*tatlu*) about the Kingdom of Solomon. But Solomon did not disbelieve.

Rather, the devils disbelieved, teaching people magic and what was revealed (*unzil*) to the angels at Babel, Hārūt and Mārūt.” According to a *ḥadīth* in *al-Durr*, Solomon used to talk to trees as he planted them. He would enquire of their therapeutic properties, and the plants used to inform him accordingly. Soon after his death, Solomon’s knowledge was written by the devils who then secretly stashed their book in the temple.

Subsequently, they publically retrieved the book, thus succeeding in convincing people that it was the writing of Solomon himself. But the book which the devils thus recited contained both genuine remedies and reprehensible magic. It was in this regard that the

verse was revealed saying, “And they followed what the devils fabricated about the Kingdom of Solomon . . . and what was revealed to the two angels.” But, the *ḥadīth* continues, it is mentioned that Ubayy read, “And what was being recited (*yutlā*) to the two angels.”⁹⁵⁹ Hence the word *unzil* (was revealed) has been replaced by the word *yutlā* (was recited), the passive form of the verb *tatlu* (recited) which was mentioned earlier in the verse. The result is that the divine origin of the angels’ knowledge of magic is rendered ambiguous.

Qur’ān 2:185 suggests that, on account of illness or travel, one may postpone the fasts of Ramadan but compensate for the lapse by fasting on an equal number of other days. The verse does not indicate that the compensatory days must be consecutive. According to a *ḥadīth* in *al-Durr*, however, ‘Ā’ishah says that the verse was revealed with these words, “A number of other consecutive days.” ‘Ā’ishah adds that the word ‘consecutive’ was subsequently dropped (*suqīṭat*). According to al-Bayhaqī, one of al-Suyūṭī’s sources, ‘Ā’ishah’s statement means that the word ‘consecutive’ was abrogated (*nusikhat*).⁹⁶⁰

A similar insertion of the word ‘consecutive’ was found in Ubayy’s reading of Qur’ān 2:196. The verse prescribes an alternative for pilgrims who possess no sacrificial animal to offer. If such pilgrims are not accompanied by their families, they should fast three days while on the pilgrimage and another seven days on their return home.

⁹⁵⁹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 1, p. 502; Cf. al-Ṭabarī, vol. 1, pp. 519-520; Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, pp. 338-48; al-Shawkānī, p. 121; and al-Ālūsī, vol. 1, pp. 536-38.

⁹⁶⁰ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 2, p. 247. Cf. al-Ṭabarī, vol. 2, pp. 179-189; Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, p. 467; al-Shawkānī, pp. 165-66, 167; al-Ālūsī, (1995) vol. 2, pp. 74-75.

According to *al-Durr*, Ubayy's reading specifies that the three days must be consecutive.⁹⁶¹

Qur'ān 3:159 tells Muḥammad to seek the counsel of his companions; and to put his trust in God after reaching a decision. But that would mean that some of the affairs of Muslims could be decided aside from divine revelation. However, a variant reading in al-Suyūfī has God saying, "And when I have decided a matter for you, O Muḥammad, put your trust in God."⁹⁶² The result is that God decides instead of Muḥammad. Al-Suyūfī garnered this reading from Ibn Abī Ḥātim.⁹⁶³ Al-Shawkānī includes a variant reading that affects only the word *'azamta* (you decide) of the canonical reading. The variant reads that word as *'azamtu* (I decide), thus changing only the last vowel.⁹⁶⁴ The result, here too, is that God decides instead of Muḥammad. But whereas al-Shawkānī's variant involves only the replacement of a vowel, the extensive insertion reported in the exegeses of Ibn Abī Ḥātim and al-Suyūfī is extraneous to the canonical ductus.

Qur'ān 24:31 prohibits Muslim women from revealing their *zīnah* except to certain specified relatives and categories of individuals. The commentators explain *zīnah* variously as beauty or ornaments. One of the categories of individuals to whom women may thus expose their *zīnah* is their slaves, referred to in Qur'ān 24:31 as 'what their right hands possess'. But the verse posed a problem for later piety when it was thought

⁹⁶¹ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 2, p. 365. Cf. al-Ṭabarī, vol. 2, pp. 296-304; Ibn Kathīr, vol. 2, pp. 502-503; al-Shawkānī, pp. 178-80; al-Ālūsī, (1995) vol. 2, pp. 99-100.

⁹⁶² Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 4, p. 90; al-Ṭabarī, vol. 3, pp. 193-94; Ibn Kathīr, vol. 2, p. 797; and al-Ālūsī, vol. 3, p. 168.

⁹⁶³ Ibn Abi Hatim, vol. 2, p. 286.

⁹⁶⁴ Al-Shawkānī, p. 325.

objectionable for a woman’s *zīnah* to be seen by her male slaves. A *ḥadīth* in *al-Durr* shows two early exegetes, Ṭāwūs and Mujāhid, expressing their anxiety over the morality of the canonical reading. They say: “The slave should not look at the hair of his mistress.” Ṭāwūs and Mujāhid continue to say that, according to one reading the category in question is, “what your right hands possess—those who have not reached puberty.”⁹⁶⁵ The variant thus contains a lengthy insertion in which women are allowed to expose their *zīnah* not to all their slaves, but only to those slaves who have not reached puberty. Similarly, according to another *ḥadīth* in *al-Durr*, the first reading (*al-qirā’ah al-ūlā*) was as follows: “those who have not reached puberty from among what your right hands possess.”⁹⁶⁶

Qur’ān 33:59 announces that God and his angels bless the prophet. According to a *ḥadīth* in *al-Durr*, Ḥumaydah says, “We inherited ‘Ā’ishah’s possessions and found that, in her codex, Qur’ān 33:59 says, ‘God and his angels bless the prophet and those who reach the first rows.’”⁹⁶⁷ The variant is therefore an encouragement to Muslims to rush ahead and join the first row when they congregate for prayer.

In Ibn Mas‘ūd’s reading, Qur’ān 37:102 grants a rare glimpse into the emotional state of Abraham as he informs his son of the plan to sacrifice him. The standard reading is as follows: When the boy was old enough to work with his father, Abraham said, “My

⁹⁶⁵ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 11, p. 32. Both al-Ṭabarī and al-Ālūsī mention a variant reading of *aymānuhunn* (what their right hands possess) as *aymānukum* (what your right hands possess) thus changing the possessive pronoun from the third person feminine to the second person masculine. Only *al-Durr* has the extensive insertion making the slaves pre-pubescent. Cf. al-Ṭabarī, vol. 18, pp. 145-46; Ibn Kathīr, vol. 6, p. 2497; al-Shawkānī, p. 1220; and al-Ālūsī, vol. 10, p. 211-213.

⁹⁶⁶ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 11, p. 32.

⁹⁶⁷ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 12, p. 135. Cf. al-Ṭabarī, vol. 22, pp. 52-53; Ibn Kathīr, vol. 6, pp. 2841-59; al-Shawkānī, pp. 1419-22; and al-Ālūsī, vol. 12, pp. 108-111.

son, I have seen myself sacrificing you in a dream.”⁹⁶⁸ According to *al-Durr*, Ibn Mas‘ūd read: When the boy was old enough to work with his father, Abraham, keeping his grief to himself, said, “My son, I have seen myself sacrificing you in a dream.”⁹⁶⁹ The variant thus exposes Abraham’s grief.

The variants under the present caption were omitted by both al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr but mentioned by al-Suyūṭī. Although al-Shawkānī and al-Ālūsī generally copy variants reported by al-Suyūṭī, on these occasions they abstained from doing so. Hence al-Suyūṭī’s interest in these particular variants remains incomparable.

7.6 Summary

It is now evident that al-Suyūṭī had a much greater interest in variant Qur’ān readings than did al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr. *Al-Durr* mentions a large number of such readings which occur neither in the *tafsīr* of al-Ṭabarī nor in that of Ibn Kathīr. If a variant is mentioned in the *tafsīrs* of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr, invariably it occurs also in *al-Durr*. But even in such cases al-Suyūṭī’s interest in the variant is unique among these exegetes. Al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr often mention the variants only to disparage them. Al-Ṭabarī sees the variants as a nuisance either to be explained away or to be harmonized with what he deems to be the genuine reading. Al-Ṭabarī would often dismiss a variant on the basis that it is not in agreement with the ‘Uthmānic codex. Ibn Kathīr would often dismiss a variant on the basis that it is not among the seven canonical readings. Hence

⁹⁶⁸ Qur’ān 37:102; Abdel Haleem, p. 287.

⁹⁶⁹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 12, p. 429. Cf. al-Ṭabarī, vol. 23, pp. 91-93; Ibn Kathīr, vol. 7, pp. 2983; al-Shawkānī, pp. 1494-96; and al-Ālūsī, vol. 13, pp. 186-88.

these two exegeses were themselves varied one from another in their treatment of variant readings.

Al-Suyūṭī's approach to variant readings is distinctive from that of either al-Ṭabarī or Ibn Kathīr. And whereas al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr are unified in their abhorrence for variant readings, al-Suyūṭī in contrast welcomes variant readings. Al-Suyūṭī appends no derogatory remarks to the variants he reports. Whereas al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr usually deal with the variants as if they represent peripheral issues, al-Suyūṭī mentions them on par with other issues affecting the task of exegesis. Thus al-Suyūṭī has made variant readings central to *tafsīr*.

Al-Suyūṭī's superlative interest in variant readings is understandable in the light of the historical evolution of Muslim attitudes towards variant readings. By al-Suyūṭī's day, some Muslim scholars had reached a refined understanding of the relationship between the Qur'ān's seven modes of revelation (*aḥruf*) and the various canonical readings (*qirā'āt*) of the Qur'ān. The classical Muslim scholars agree that the Qur'ān was revealed to Muḥammad in seven modes, all equally valid. The scholars could not agree, however, on how to define the seven modes.

Al-Ṭabarī thought that the seven modes were seven readings of the Qur'ān, each in accordance with a prominent Arabic dialect. He explained that in the early days God facilitated the reception of the Qur'ān among the various tribes by allowing for its recitation in accordance with the various dialects. But this facility later proved unnecessary by the time of Muḥammad's death after local opposition to the Qur'ān had dwindled. Moreover, the previous allowance for multiple readings of the Qur'ān became an embarrassment after the prophet's death when lay Muslims began to anathematize

unfamiliar but genuine readings. It was in response to this confusion that ‘Uthmān ordered the compilation of the Qur’ān according to the dialect of Muḥammad’s tribe, the Quraysh. In his insistence that all readings now conform to his codex, ‘Uthmān had effectively abrogated the readings in accordance with the other dialects. Yet, according to al-Ṭabarī, ‘Uthmān’s drastic measure was justified since it was merely permissible, but not necessary, to read the Qur’ān in accordance with the other dialects. ‘Uthmān was merely foregoing a permissible act for a greater good. ‘Uthmān had to save the Muslim masses from the horrible act of unwittingly anathematizing the Book of God.

Thus, for al-Ṭabarī, there remained only one genuine reading of the Qur’ān—one that conforms to the codex of ‘Uthmān. However, al-Ṭabarī had no clear theory that would accommodate the staggering variety of readings which conform to the codex. There were multiple copies of the codex with minor variations among them. Hence we may speak of a single codex in view of the relatively minor discrepancies among the copies, or of the plural codices when it is necessary to highlight those differences. Al-Ṭabarī was aware of variations among the codices, for he often spoke not of a single codex but of the codices of the Muslims. Moreover, the ‘Uthmānic codices were devoid of diacritical marks and vowels. Thus the same consonantal ductus could be read in several different ways. Whenever he was faced with a variety of reported readings, al-Ṭabarī was compelled by his hermeneutics to determine which among them was correct. Having done so, he would either dismiss the other readings or attempt to show that they are not, really, very different from the accepted reading.

Al-Ṭabarī’s younger contemporary Ibn Mujāhid wrote a book on seven readings, all conforming to the ‘Uthmānic codex, thus giving the seven a decisive advantage of

popularity over other competing readings. The masses, however, began to confuse the seven *aḥruf* with Ibn Mujaḥid's seven readings. But the scholars resisted conflating the *aḥruf* with the readings (*qirā'āt*). Nonetheless, by Ibn Kathīr's day Ibn Mujaḥid's seven readings were so well accepted that Ibn Kathīr could simply dismiss variant readings as falling outside of the seven. Yet Ibn Kathīr was reluctant to mention even the variations among the seven. Like al-Ṭabarī before him, Ibn Kathīr had no way of showing how various readings can all genuinely represent the same Book of God. Variant readings thus proved embarrassing for Ibn Kathīr as well.

Subsequently, however, Ibn al-Jazarī made better sense of the relationship between the seven *aḥruf* and the various readings. He clarified the three criteria for the canonicity of a reading: its agreement with Arabic grammar; its conformity with the 'Uthmānic codices; and its trusted chain of authorities. On the basis of these criteria, Ibn al-Jazarī added another three readings to Ibn Mujaḥid's seven. More importantly, however, he argued that these ten readings are all within the ambit of the seven *aḥruf*. Hence the ten readings are all divine revelation. He also accepts in principle that there could be other variants which meet the three criteria and hence must be accepted.

According to Ibn al-Jazarī, the copies of the 'Uthmānic codex were deliberately varied so as to accommodate various readings. Moreover, the 'Uthmānic codices were deliberately written without diacritical marks for the very purpose of permitting a variety of readings. In this way, the 'Uthmānic codices accommodated the ten readings which are remnants of the seven *aḥruf*. There are still puzzling aspects of Ibn al-Jazarī's reconstruction, especially the claim that ten readings resulted from seven *aḥruf*.

Nonetheless, his acceptance of the ten readings as divine revelation set the stage for al-Suyūfī to welcome variants which both al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr dismissed.

All of the classical exegetes, of course, had recourse to the doctrine of abrogation. With this doctrine they could claim that readings which do not conform to the ʿUthmānic codex were once revealed but subsequently abrogated. Exegetes often mentioned such readings, if only for the purpose of explicating the Qurʾānic text. Al-Suyūfī had a special interest in such readings, however, and he explained his reason in his *Itqān*. In that work he argued that some of these readings represent early exegetical attempts and therefore deserve mention over and above later attempts. Moreover, he explained that, whereas on occasion al-Ṭabarī missed the point, varied exegeses of a verse, as reported from early authorities, often stem from variant readings of the verse.

Al-Suyūfī thus intended *al-Durr* to serve as a necessary corrective to the *tafsīrs* of al-Ṭabarī, and Ibn Kathīr. Al-Shawkānī and al-Ālūsī often use *al-Durr* as a source for their own compositions. Hence it is not surprising to find in those two *tafsīrs* many of the variants which were excluded by al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr but included by al-Suyūfī. In this way, *al-Durr* has had a lasting effect on the subsequent evolution of Qurʾānic exegesis. Yet there are many variants which al-Suyūfī alone of the five exegetes included. Hence al-Suyūfī's extraordinary interest in variant readings is evident.

Chapter 8

Conclusions

I will now draw together several minor conclusions reached in my preceding chapters and show that these point to a grand conclusion: *al-Durr* was composed as a response to what Saleh termed the radical hermeneutics of Ibn Taymīyah.⁹⁷⁰ Al-Suyūfī was intimately familiar with the *Muqaddimah* in which Ibn Taymīyah delineates his hermeneutics.⁹⁷¹ Al-Suyūfī copied much of that work into his *Itqān*, adding, “That much is from the discourse of Ibn Taymīyah, and it is very precious.”⁹⁷² Ibn Taymīyah presented early exegesis as being unified; and later exegesis as being diverse due to subsequent corrupting influences.⁹⁷³ In his view, such negative influences would have been avoided if *tafsīr* were restricted to the bare mention of the *tafsīr* traditions reporting the exegesis of the *salaf* (predecessors).⁹⁷⁴ This is precisely what al-Suyūfī has done. He composed *al-Durr* as a collection of early exegetical traditions. Only on extremely rare occasions did he add a comment of his own, and then too, in the briefest of notes.⁹⁷⁵

⁹⁷⁰ Walid Saleh, “Ibn Taymiyya and the Rise of Radical Hermeneutics,” in *Ibn Taymiyya and his Times*, ed. Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 123-62, p. 125.

⁹⁷¹ Ibn Taymīyah, *Muqaddimah fī uṣul al-tafsīr in* Musāʿid b. Sulaymān b. Nāṣir al-Ṭayyār, *Sharh Muqaddimah fī uṣul al-tafsīr li-bn Taymīyah* (Damam: Dār Ibn al-Jawzī, 2007-8).

⁹⁷² Al-Suyūfī, *al-Itqān*, vols. 3-4, p. 472

⁹⁷³ Ibn Taymīyah, *Muqaddimah*, pp. 59, 139.

⁹⁷⁴ Ibn Taymīyah, *Muqaddimah*, p. 140; al-Suyūfī, *al-Itqān*, vols. 3-4, p. 472; Saleh, “Ibn Taymiyya,” p. 142.

⁹⁷⁵ See, for example, al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 1, p. 653.

However, al-Suyūṭī has adopted that formal feature for the purpose of de-radicalizing tradition-based exegesis.

As Saleh has shown, only two medieval exegetes, Ibn Kathīr and al-Suyūṭī, have composed their works along the lines delineated by Ibn Taymīyah.⁹⁷⁶ We have seen above that on several topics Ibn Kathīr has tried to keep the *tafsīr* tradition within the narrow Salafī constraints suggested by Ibn Taymīyah; on the other hand, al-Suyūṭī steered the tradition towards a greater openness. Ibn Taymīyah had identified many corrupting influences, including Israelite traditions, Ṣūfī tendencies, and sectarian exegesis. On each of these subjects, Ibn Kathīr nudges the tradition in the Salafī direction while al-Suyūṭī welcomes the very influences which Ibn Taymīyah decried. Hence the present work has shown that the *tafsīrs* of Ibn Kathīr and al-Suyūṭī took Ibn Taymīyah’s suggestions in two different directions. Al-Suyūṭī maintained the formal features of those suggestions; Ibn Kathīr maintained their spirit.

Although he based his exegesis largely on that of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr omitted many of the legends and Israelite traditions he found in al-Ṭabarī’s *tafsīr*.⁹⁷⁷ Often he would mention a legend only to lambaste it, especially to castigate it as an Israelite tradition unworthy of Muslim belief. On the other hand, al-Suyūṭī included a vast supply of such stories. In this regard he lost nothing essential from al-Ṭabarī’s *tafsīr*, but included other legends from a wide array of early Muslim sources. Rather than dismiss these stories, al-Suyūṭī often buttressed belief in them by appealing to multiple authorities.

⁹⁷⁶ Saleh, “Ibn Taymiyya,” pp. 152-53.

⁹⁷⁷ See above, Chapter 3.

In terms of Ṣūfī influences, al-Suyūṭī not only surpassed the exegeses of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr, but also the Ṣūfī *tafsīrs*.⁹⁷⁸ Al-Suyūṭī introduced a number of traditions depicting Jesus during his schooldays as the pioneer of allegorical exegesis. Jesus appears in these traditions astounding his would-be teacher with esoteric interpretations of the Arabic alphabet and of the letters of the Qur’ān’s *basmalah*. This type of exegesis is the stock-in-trade of Ṣūfī *tafsīrs*. However, Ṣūfī exegetes make very minimal appeal to Jesus’ authority in their exegeses of the *basmalah* and of the disjointed letters at the head of some Qur’ānic chapters.

Moreover, while Ṣūfīs generally see Jesus as a wandering ascetic, al-Suyūṭī superseded them all in capitalizing on that image of Jesus.⁹⁷⁹ In his commentary on Qur’ān 3:48, al-Suyūṭī presented a list of one hundred and four sayings of Jesus. These sayings represent Jesus as a wandering ascetic and a wisdom sage. I could find no other *tafsīr* containing such a long list of Jesus’ sayings. Hence al-Suyūṭī’s exegesis of that verse marks a unique moment in the history of Qur’ānic exegesis.

As for sectarian influences, al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr were reticent to include traditions that Shī‘īs could seize upon in their counter-Sunnī polemical discourses.⁹⁸⁰ Yet some such traditions are found even in Sunnī sources. Al-Suyūṭī included a tradition showing that, at the pool of Khumm, Muḥammad promoted ‘Alī as the patron of the believers. He mentioned yet another tradition saying that during Muḥammad’s lifetime some Muslims used to read Qur’ān 5:67 in a variation openly pronouncing that ‘Alī is the

⁹⁷⁸ See above, Chapter 5.

⁹⁷⁹ See above, Chapter 5.

⁹⁸⁰ See above, Chapter 6.

patron of the believers. Neither al-Ṭabarī nor Ibn Kathīr included these traditions. That al-Suyūṭī would be interested in ‘Alī was again due to al-Suyūṭī’s Ṣūfism. Al-Suyūṭī’s Shādhilī *ṭarīqah* traces its authority back to that of ‘Alī, as do most major lines of Ṣūfī authority.

As a corollary of his support for ‘Alī, al-Suyūṭī also includes traditions critical of ‘Alī’s political opponents.⁹⁸¹ This was most evident in al-Suyūṭī’s exegesis of Qur’ān 34:51. The verse is believed to have been revealed in the Meccan phase of Muḥammad’s career when a Muslim polity did not exist. Consequently, Qur’ān 34:51 is far removed from the Muslim internecine conflicts that would arise after Muḥammad’s death. However, early exegetes politicized the verse by linking it to the ominous prediction of a certain Sufyānī who would attack Mecca. The Sufyānī is obviously a descendant of Abu Sufyān whose son Mu‘āwiyah began the Umayyad dynasty in defiance of ‘Alī and his descendants. It was Mu‘āwiyah’s son Yazīd who commissioned an army towards Mecca. Their target was ‘Abdullāh b. al-Zubayr who was rallying followers at Mecca in a movement to counter the Umayyad caliphate. Al-Ṭabarī included a tradition about the Sufyānī, but was ambivalent about the worth of the tradition. Later, Ibn Kathīr expressed his shock that al-Ṭabarī had missed the opportunity to impugn that tradition. On the other hand, having seen Ibn Kathīr’s disparagement of that single tradition, al-Suyūṭī then supplied eighteen traditions reaffirming the premonition about the Sufyānī.

One of al-Suyūṭī’s traditions on the Sufyānī is extremely bold, for it shows Muḥammad predicting seven *fitnahs* (civil wars), each associated with a major Muslim

⁹⁸¹ See above, Chapter 6.

centre.⁹⁸² One of the transmitters of that tradition equated some of the *fitnahs* with some of the chief opponents of ‘Alī. The transmitter thus names two of the *fitnahs* as Ṭalḥah and al-Zubayr, the two stalwarts who had joined ‘Ā’ishah’s revolt against ‘Alī. *Al-Durr* is therefore unique among the *tafsīrs* for its inclusion of that tradition directing criticism at some of Islam’s most revered personages.

In sum, whereas Ibn Taymīyah was concerned that Shī‘ī exegetes had introduced corruptions into the *tafsīr* tradition, al-Suyūṭī was intent on including this variety of exegesis. For, prior to al-Suyūṭī, the traditions depicting such Shī‘ī influence had already made their way into Sunnī sources. And it was now al-Suyūṭī’s method to gather exegetical traditions from Sunnī sources. The extent to which *al-Durr* thus favours ‘Alī was not lost on some Shī‘ī writers who appealed to *al-Durr* in support of their position.

According to Ibn Taymīyah, both the Qur’ān and its exegesis were revealed to Muḥammad; and it was the task of Muḥammad’s companions to transmit to their followers these two divine revelations: the Qur’ān and its exegesis.⁹⁸³ On the other hand, al-Suyūṭī shatters this presumption about an early unified exegesis. Ibn Taymīyah had offered several reasons for differences arising in early and, especially, later exegeses. Yet he failed to mention the simple observation that various interpretations of the Qur’ān stem from variant readings of the Qur’ān. Al-Suyūṭī now offers that additional reason—one that runs deep: the Companions were not all elucidating the same text.⁹⁸⁴ The Qur’ān was available to them in various readings. Hence their exegeses were varied, one from

⁹⁸² Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 12, pp. 238-39.

⁹⁸³ Ibn Taymīyah, *Muqaddimah*, pp. 31-32.

⁹⁸⁴ See above, Chapter 7.

another, at their very cores. Not only is the exegesis of the Qur'ān polyvalent; the text of the Qur'ān itself is polyvalent.

Al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr did not know how to accommodate the wide variety of Qur'ānic variants they encountered in Muslim literature and among contemporary reciters of the Qur'ān. For, how could competing readings equally represent the same book of God? Both exegetes believed, as did Muslim scholars more generally, that the Qur'ān was revealed in seven modes (*aḥruf*). But neither al-Ṭabarī nor Ibn Kathīr had a theory to explain how the seven modes resulted in the several readings (*qirā'āt*) which they knew were backed by reputable authorities. Al-Ṭabarī thought that only one mode remained valid after 'Uthmān's command to burn competing codices.⁹⁸⁵ Al-Ṭabarī therefore treats the supposed single surviving mode (*ḥarf*) as one reading (*qirā'ah*). Hence al-Ṭabarī can often be seen supporting one reading at the expense of others, for he must continuously determine the single correct reading. Whenever he did accommodate two readings, he did so after explaining that they are only insignificant variations of each other.

Ibn Kathīr included even fewer variants than did al-Ṭabarī. At first glance, this reduction in the mention of variants is surprising seeing that in Ibn Kathīr's day Ibn Mujāhid's seven readings (*qirā'āt*) were commonly accepted as canonical. Ibn Kathīr himself accepts these seven readings, and often dismisses a reading on the ground that it is not one of the seven. However, Ibn Kathīr had explained that the seven (*qirā'āt*) are not the same as the seven modes (*aḥruf*).⁹⁸⁶ But given that the modes were all divinely

⁹⁸⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 1, pp. 34-35.

⁹⁸⁶ Ibn Kathīr, vol. 1, pp. 73-75.

revealed, and the readings were not the same as the modes, Ibn Kathīr found himself unable to account for the origins of prevalent readings.

Ibn Kathīr had an additional reason for refusing to reproduce reports on the variety of readings he found in al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr*: Ibn Kathīr was following a directive of Ibn Taymīyah. Ibn Taymīyah had cautioned exegetes against presenting a variety of views—except where necessary.⁹⁸⁷ Ibn Kathīr thus aimed at minimizing the differences in early reported exegesis. On the other hand, al-Suyūfī aimed at elucidating this variety.

The genius of Ibn al-Jazarī is largely responsible for al-Suyūfī's new approach which rises above that of both al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr. Ibn al-Jazarī argued that ʿUthmān, by publishing his codex, did not intend to abrogate the *aḥruf*; rather, he intended to accommodate them.⁹⁸⁸ On this view, ʿUthmān excluded diacritical marks and vowel indicators from the codices for the very purpose of allowing for a variety of readings. According to Ibn al-Jazarī, a multiplicity of reading traditions could thus be accommodated on the same consonantal ductus. Moreover, Ibn al-Jazarī maintains that the copies of the codex sent to various cities were varied one from another, even slightly, not as the result of copyist errors, but in a further effort to accommodate variants. Ibn al-Jazarī thus argued that a wide variety of readings (*qirā'āt*) were remnants of the seven modes (*aḥruf*) which, according to Muslim traditions, were all divinely revealed. Based on his criteria for authenticating contemporary reading traditions, Ibn al-Jazarī then listed another three readings to be added to Ibn Mujāhid's seven.

⁹⁸⁷ Ibn Taymīyah, *Muqaddimah*, p. 257.

⁹⁸⁸ Ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr*, vol. 1, p. 31.

Ibn al-Jazarī's views are not entirely satisfying, for the number of accepted readings now exceeds the number of modes. Nonetheless, al-Suyūṭī accepted Ibn al-Jazarī's views.⁹⁸⁹ Therefore al-Suyūṭī had at his disposal ten authoritative readings as compared with the mere seven available to Ibn Kathīr. But al-Suyūṭī had the additional advantage of being able to consider all of these readings as remnants of the divinely revealed modes. To al-Suyūṭī, therefore, the readings were not extraneous elements to be discarded but divine dicta to be expounded. Al-Suyūṭī achieved a further advantage in this regard by developing a special theory for the inclusion of variant readings in exegesis. He argued that many reported variants are examples of early exegesis, and that these therefore deserved inclusion in tradition-based *tafsīrs*.⁹⁹⁰ By accommodating the many variants he did, al-Suyūṭī was thus pursuing his own hermeneutic in contradistinction to that of Ibn Taymīyah.

The two tendencies, one towards *tafsīr* by way of tradition, and the other towards *tafsīr* by way of reason, were always intertwined. However, Ibn Taymīyah in his *Muqaddimah* castigated the use of human opinions in exegesis. Thus he attempted to delimit exegesis to the tradition-based variety. Responding to any such suggestion that reason cannot be used in exegesis, al-Suyūṭī clarified in his *Itqān* that tradition and reason form two tiers of exegesis. A qualified exegete is fit to apply reason after first taking stock of the traditions. Al-Suyūṭī then listed fifteen qualifications of an exegete.⁹⁹¹

⁹⁸⁹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, p. 139.

⁹⁹⁰ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 4, p. 484.

⁹⁹¹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 4, p. 479.

Accordingly, the fifteenth qualification is “gifted knowledge (*‘ilm al-mawhibah*).”⁹⁹² Al-Suyūfī then cites a *ḥadīth* to support the veracity of this type of knowledge. According to that *ḥadīth*, if anyone acts according to what he knows, God will teach him what he does not know.⁹⁹³ Al-Suyūfī then addresses his readers directly, saying:

Perhaps you doubt the existence of gifted knowledge, and you are saying to yourself, “This is not something within the power of humans.” Yet it is not as dubious as you think. Rather, the way to obtain such knowledge is to apply the means by which it is gifted. The means include good deeds and asceticism (*zuhd*).⁹⁹⁴

That is how al-Suyūfī defended esoteric knowledge in the *Itqān*. In *al-Durr*, he continues to defend such knowledge, but in more subtle ways. For example, al-Suyūfī depicts Idrīs as an extreme ascetic who has advance knowledge of Qur’ānic exegesis.⁹⁹⁵ In a bygone era, before the Qur’ān could be revealed to Muḥammad, Idrīs cited and elaborated on the Qur’ān as he debated with the angel of death. Idrīs insisted on the basis of the Qur’ān that he should not be expelled from Paradise. God, adjudicating over the debate, declared in favour of Idrīs.⁹⁹⁶ Through this story, al-Suyūfī has established a strong bond between asceticism and knowledge. The ascetic Idrīs not only outwits the angel, but also proves himself a competent exegete.

⁹⁹² Al-Suyūfī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 4, p. 479.

⁹⁹³ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 4, p. 479.

⁹⁹⁴ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 4, p. 479.

⁹⁹⁵ See above, Chapter 3.

⁹⁹⁶ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr*, vol. 10, pp. 94-95.

Al-Suyūṭī has likewise proved the worth of asceticism and Ṣūfism through the wisdom sayings of Solomon.⁹⁹⁷ Solomon in all his glory is hardly a model ascetic. Yet his wisdom sayings, as depicted by al-Suyūṭī, counsel the fear of God and other aspects of Ṣūfī wisdom. Moreover, Solomon advises that one consults a *murshid* (guide) before making decisions.⁹⁹⁸ Al-Suyūṭī could not have been unaware that the term *murshid* in that saying would suggest to his readers a Ṣūfī *shaykh*. Thus the wisdom sayings of Solomon serve to emphasize the strong link between asceticism and esoteric knowledge.

Moreover, al-Suyūṭī has related a tradition in which Luqmān, who was not a prophet, is said to be a *muḥaddath* (an inspired person).⁹⁹⁹ In the traditions regarding Luqmān, the link between asceticism and wisdom receives further emphasis. Al-Suyūṭī gathered into his exegesis of Qur’ān 31:12 a corpus of fifty-seven sayings in which Luqmān teaches a wide range of ascetic principles.¹⁰⁰⁰ In recounting these traditions, al-Suyūṭī was simultaneously defending both Ṣūfism and exegesis based on esoteric knowledge. It is interesting that al-Suyūṭī listed two books of proverbs among his sources for the sayings of Luqmān.¹⁰⁰¹ Al-Suyūṭī therefore went beyond the religious sources to collect wisdom sayings from the belles-lettres. For, such aphorisms had been largely marginalized from the religious literature. Al-Suyūṭī thus gave the wisdom sayings new prominence in his exegesis.

⁹⁹⁷ See above, Chapter 4.

⁹⁹⁸ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 10, p. 328.

⁹⁹⁹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 10, p. 524.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 11, pp. 629-46.

¹⁰⁰¹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 11, pp. 629, 632.

In presenting such a large stock of wisdom sayings of Luqmān, al-Suyūṭī was making the point that God bestows wisdom and knowledge on persons who were not prophets. Al-Suyūṭī took that to be the general meaning of Qur’ān 2:269 which asserts that God grants wisdom to whomever he wills. The tradition-based exegetes before *al-Durr* tried to equate *ḥikmah* (wisdom) with *sunnah* (prophetic practice) in their exegeses of several Qur’ānic verses. Al-Suyūṭī often agreed with that interpretation. In reference to Qur’ān 2:269, however, al-Suyūṭī refused to abide by that interpretation. Al-Ṭabarī had explained that *ḥikmah* includes *sunnah*; but Ibn Kathīr later reversed the order and said that *sunnah* includes *ḥikmah*.¹⁰⁰² Whereas Ibn Kathīr reversed the hierarchy of *ḥikmah* and *sunnah*, however, al-Suyūṭī decided to save *ḥikmah* from being reduced to *sunnah*. Al-Suyūṭī gathered as many as fifty-eight traditions depicting the meaning of wisdom—not one of these mentioned *sunnah*.¹⁰⁰³ Al-Suyūṭī was thus steering the meaning of *ḥikmah* back to its literal meaning of wisdom, maxim or aphorism. To emphasize the point, al-Suyūṭī included a maxim of Luqmān in reference to this verse as well. Moreover, he included a *ḥadīth* in which Muḥammad says, “If God intends betterment for his servant, God causes him to understand the religion and guides him by inspiration (*alhamahu rushdah*).¹⁰⁰⁴ This *ḥadīth* affirms the bestowal of esoteric knowledge. Hence it mirrors the *ḥadīth* we saw above from the *Itqān*. In that *ḥadīth*, Muḥammad says, “If anyone acts according to what he knows, God will teach him what he does not know.”¹⁰⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰² Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 3, p. 109; Ibn Kathīr, vol. 2, p. 643.

¹⁰⁰³ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, pp. 290-98.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 3, p. 296.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 4, p. 479.

Hence, in both the *Itqān* and *al-Durr*, al-Suyūṭī defends esoteric knowledge and its validity as a source of exegesis.

Throughout this study we have attempted to identify the purposes for which al-Suyūṭī composed *al-Durr*. A simple conclusion would be that he composed it for the purpose of gathering exegetical traditions lest they be lost to posterity. Such was the verdict offered by Geoffroy about the mission in life which al-Suyūṭī's adopted.¹⁰⁰⁶ Likewise al-Shurbajī wrote that, in composing *al-Durr*, al-Suyūṭī's purpose was merely to gather as many exegetical traditions as possible.¹⁰⁰⁷ Such a simple conclusion is based on a superficial overview of *al-Durr*. Given our detailed analysis of the specific views which al-Suyūṭī supported with long lists of traditions, however, a more complex conclusion is now evident. Al-Suyūṭī was not simply collecting traditions. He was going out of his way to find traditions on particular themes of interest to him.

In his epilogue to *al-Durr*, al-Suyūṭī identifies four early exegeses as models of the tradition-based genre: those of 'Abd b. Ḥumayd; al-Ṭabarī; Ibn al-Mundhir; and Ibn Abī Ḥātim.¹⁰⁰⁸ With these works available to him, why would al-Suyūṭī essay another tradition-based *tafsīr*? Al-Suyūṭī had noticed the tendency of Ibn Kathīr to follow in the footsteps of Ibn Taymīyah in his disregard for certain types of traditions. Al-Suyūṭī intended to steer tradition-based *tafsīr* towards an openness that would incorporate the traditions of the four model *tafsīrs* which Ibn Kathīr discarded. Moreover, al-Suyūṭī

¹⁰⁰⁶ E. Geoffroy, "Al-Suyūṭī," in *EF*², vol. 9, p. 915.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Muḥammad Yusuf al-Shurbajī, *al-Imām al-Suyūṭī wa juhūduh fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Damascus: Dār al-Maktabī, 1421/2000), p. 267.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 15, p. 820.

incorporated traditions from other early but largely neglected exegetical works of the tradition-based genre, such as that of Ibn Mardawayh.

In my previous chapters it became clear that often al-Ṭabarī included traditions which Ibn Kathīr found objectionable. For example, al-Ṭabarī mentioned many legends which Ibn Kathīr denounced. Moreover, whereas al-Ṭabarī mentioned many variant readings of the Qur’ān, Ibn Kathīr mentioned relatively fewer traditions. Furthermore, Ibn Kathīr reversed al-Ṭabarī’s explanation that *ḥikmah* is broader than *sunnah*. In each of these instances, Ibn Kathīr betrays the influence of Ibn Taymīyah’s radical hermeneutics. Al-Suyūṭī therefore turned the tables on Ibn Taymīyah. Al-Suyūṭī defended the legends which Ibn Kathīr denounced; picked up the variant readings which Ibn Kathīr dropped; and re-opened the meaning of *ḥikmah*. Whereas Ibn Kathīr pursued the spirit of Ibn Taymīyah’s hermeneutics, al-Suyūṭī maintained only the formal feature of strict reliance on tradition. The contents of al-Suyūṭī’s traditions, however, would be troubling to Ibn Taymīyah and Ibn Kathīr.

Ibn Taymīyah had presented a strong argument in favour of the tradition-based genre of *tafsīrs* to the exclusion of all else. Al-Suyūṭī took up the challenge to present a *tafsīr* of that form, but one that will defend Ṣūfism and polyvalent exegesis. Al-Suyūṭī’s method was mainly to gather traditions from the four model exegeses he mentioned, and to add traditions from a vast array of sources that were not limited to the religious literature. But his method should not be mistaken for his mission. In gathering this diversity of traditions, al-Suyūṭī’s mission was to show the breadth of the early *tafsīr* tradition before the rise of later radicalizing tendencies.

In the foregoing chapters we have continuously traced the influence of *al-Durr* in two subsequent major exegetical works, those of al-Shawkānī and al-Ālūsī. Despite his Zaydī background, al-Shawkānī was an aspiring Salafī whose writings, including his *tafsīr*, are welcome in Salafī circles.¹⁰⁰⁹ Al-Ālūsī’s tendencies are likewise composite. On the one hand, he adheres to some Salafī principles; on the other hand, he includes allegorical exegesis in his *tafsīr*.¹⁰¹⁰ Both of these *tafsīrs* prove to be popular. The degree to which they have been influenced by *al-Durr* is therefore a tribute to al-Suyūṭī. Both works make ample use of *al-Durr*. In the introduction to his *tafsīr*, al-Shawkānī acknowledges his constant reliance on *al-Durr* as a source of traditions.¹⁰¹¹ Al-Ālūsī is less reliant on *al-Durr*, but can often be seen copying its traditions. On a few of these occasions, al-Ālūsī acknowledges his use of al-Suyūṭī’s *tafsīr*.¹⁰¹²

I will recap here only a few illustrative instances in which I have demonstrated the influence of *al-Durr* on these two *tafsīrs*. Al-Shawkānī copied al-Suyūṭī’s traditions on the seduction of the angels Hārūt and Mārūt.¹⁰¹³ Al-Ālūsī was convinced by al-Suyūṭī’s demonstration of the authenticity of these traditions. However, he interpreted those traditions allegorically in order to avoid the negative connotations of the story.¹⁰¹⁴ Al-

¹⁰⁰⁹ Bernard Haykel, *Revival and Reform in Islam: The Legacy of Muḥammad al-Shawkānī* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) pp. 18-19, 143, 165.

¹⁰¹⁰ Basheer M. Nafī, “Abu al-Thana’ al-Alusi: An Alim, Ottoman Mufti, and Exegete of the Quran,” in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 34 (2002) 465-94, p. 472; al-Ālūsī, vol. 1, p. 538.

¹⁰¹¹ Al-Shawkānī, p. 36.

¹⁰¹² See, for example, Al-Ālūsī, vol. 5, p. 282.

¹⁰¹³ See above, Chapter 3.

¹⁰¹⁴ Al-Ālūsī, vol. 1, p. 538.

Ālūsī copied thirteen of Luqmān’s sayings from *al-Durr*.¹⁰¹⁵ These were subsequently copied into the exegesis of Ibn ‘Āshūr.¹⁰¹⁶ Al-Suyūṭī’s traditions affirming that Muḥammad promoted ‘Alī at Ghadīr Khumm were copied by both al-Shawkānī and al-Ālūsī.¹⁰¹⁷ Al-Ālūsī attempted to impugn these traditions. Finding himself unable to do so, he switched tactics and interpreted these traditions to mean that ‘Alī is a friend of the believers—a proposition which Sunnīs wholeheartedly accept.¹⁰¹⁸ Many of the variant readings of the Qur’ān which were omitted by al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr were picked up by al-Suyūṭī only to be copied later either by al-Shawkānī or al-Ālūsī or both.¹⁰¹⁹ Those are some of the ways in which al-Suyūṭī has succeeded in leaving a lasting influence on the *tafsīr* tradition.

¹⁰¹⁵ Al-Ālūsī, vol. 12, p. 126-27.

¹⁰¹⁶ Ibn ‘Āshūr, vol. 21, p. 169; see above, Chapter 4.

¹⁰¹⁷ See above, Chapter 6.

¹⁰¹⁸ Al-Ālūsī, vol. 4, p. 287.

¹⁰¹⁹ See above, Chapter 7.

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